Photo: Sugar in Aquarius studio yard

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Acknowledgements

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Our deepest sympathies go out to the entire family, Lucille Lester, all of Sugar's siblings, his babymothers, sons and daughters, and grandchildren.

Sugar never left the ghetto and he never left music. He remained among his bredren and continued his fight to make music sustain an impoverished community, and teach the youth the right way to live. He was like a bright flame illuminating and warming everything around him. Even the hardest and coldest would melt next to his big, welcoming smile, his kindness and his generosity. His memory will live on in his music and in the music of those who learned from him and were influenced by him.

We all wished he could love forever, making his music and helping the youth. No one else can ever take his place. My biggest thanks goes out to Sugar- for being the best man at our wedding, for always welcoming us when we came to Jamaica, for making music that still moves me, and for being a wonderful human being and true friend.

In addition, many thanks always to Ray Hurford for his ongoing support and for suggesting the idea of writing this tribute. Sugar deserves so much more and I hope future generations will grant him his full due and continue to keep his music and his works alive.

Tribute to Sugar Minott

By David Kingston

The news hit very hard in our home yesterday. Reggae music has lost a true champion whose recorded works will live on, but that is only one part of his legacy. The world has lost a decent, caring person, who stood tall like a giant because of what he did for others around him. My wife and I will remember him for as long as we live, and forever be indebted to him for the kindness he showed us.

Sugar's Kingston base at 1 Robert Crescent is only a stones-throw from RJR-FM (Radio Jamaica Rediffusion), but in the mid 80's, you could find more reggae music activity going on in his yard then you could on RJR's airwaves. His sound system, Youth Promotion, was almost always strung up in the yard, and local youths would try lyrics on the mic with hopes of carrying some of that evening's entertainment. Sugar's family all held working positions that varied from cleaning the sound amps and boxes to manning the front entrance gate. Everyone had something to do with maintaining "Youth Promotion", which was more than just a geographical location, a record label, and a sound system.....it was a mind-set and mantra, a way of living.

My girlfriend and colleague Beth Lesser and I used to visit his yard regularly because it was a happening place, and always looked forward to these visits because of the vibes. It was a pure music yard, and perfect for conducting

interviews for the magazine (Reggae Quarterly) and radio show (Reggae Showcase). You might see a young Yammie Bolo plucking out a song on the guitar, or Jah Stitch, the sound's selector, cleaning records in the shade. Artists were always passing through, even if they weren't recording for Sugar, because the vibes were so nice. You often heard people say that Sugar has "the vibes", something that isn't easy to understand without meeting the man, but very apparent if you did.

Sugar used to ask us when we were planning to get married, and we always responded with "one day we will". Upon hearing this for the umpteenth time, he told us that if we weren't married the next time we visited, he was going to do something about it. We arrived back a few months later, and upon entering the yard, he immediately asked if we were married yet. Upon hearing that we weren't, he quickly left the yard, and then returned stating that he had his mother's pastor all lined up for the job, and that we could have the wedding at Robert Crescent in a few days. That would give him enough time for preparations, which we started discussing in detail. Bishop Reid, from Maxfield Avenue, would do the ceremony at 1:00 PM, and then the sound would play for an afternoon dance. We would then come back for an evening "open" dance that Sugar would keep in honour of the day. It all sounded like a good idea, with every aspect of it feeling more than right.

News seems to travel fast everywhere, but in Jamaica it travels even faster. We soon got a call from Barry G, who we already knew because I did radio link-ups with him, and he asked us to guest on his show the day before the wedding. He commented that many people travel to Jamaica to marry, but this was somewhat different. After that, many people committed to coming to the dance, and they did, the yard was rammed. General Trees, Jack Ruby, Horace Martin, Papa Dimes, Junior Byles (carrying red roses) and many other artists that we met over the years appeared, and some even did some live stuff on the microphone.

On the day of the wedding, we appeared at Sugar's as planned, and the proceedings were about to start in the living room. Bishop Reid conducted the short ceremony, with Sugar grinning ear-to-ear throughout. When it came to signing our marriage certificate, Sugar insisted that he do the honours, and we capped it off with a glass of Apple wine. With the sound all fired-up and ready to play, Jah Stitch started a "sentimental" set, that included The Hamlin's "Soul & Inspiration", Michael Prophet's "Here Comes The Bride", and Marcia Griffith's "Truly". Sugar told Stitch to play the version, and he picked up the mic to do his own sweet rendition of "Here Comes The Bride". It's hard to convey in simple words how overpowering this, and all his gestures were to us.

The dance that evening was fantastic, special in so many ways. About 4 hours were recorded by Stitch on cassette, as well as the afternoon segment, which he gave these to us as a gift the next day. While we also have lots of pictures as mementos, I only wish the day was video-taped.

Sugar later told us that he could tell that we were in love, and that people should get married as means of showing commitment.

Photo: Beth and David get married at Youth Promotion

Some 24 years later, we are still together, and even more in love than before, but Sugar is no longer here. Just a few short months ago we were joking about visiting for our 25th anniversary, and that the youths are all now old.

Whenever I think of Sugar, there are two mental images that I will always carry: one will be of his gapped-tooth, ear-to-ear grin during the ceremony, and the other of how you would often see him emerge in the morning immediately after opening his eyes, and wash his face in chalice smoke, the same way people desperately lunge for their morning coffee. He used to sing passionately about the youth, herb, dancehall, and love itself. Many will remember him for his music, which speaks for itself, but Beth and I will always remember his kindness.

The Legend of Sugar Minott & Youth Promotion

by Beth Lesser

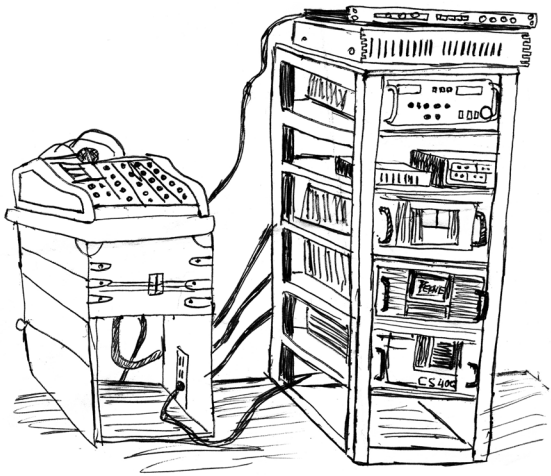


Illustration by Jackie Knockshot

Photo: *Sugar in Aquarius*

Maxfield Park, Kingston 13

Kingston has always been a musical city. Its small neighborhoods have been identified by their musical styles, and musicians have been categorized by their area of origin

Trenchtown, Kingston 12, was one of the first areas to be identified as a musical hub, with the early ska singers like Stranger Cole, Toot and the Maytals and, of course, the Wailers. The streets were lined with young aspiring artists, and every evening they would gather on the corners, under the lampposts, and harmonize.

Deejay Jah Thomas grew up in, and drew inspiration from, this musically fertile ground. "When I was a youth growing up, groups like Wailing Souls- they used to be right next door to Bob Marley on 1st street in Trenchtown. We were all in one circle. Cause I used to live a Trenchtown, Collie Smith Drive and 10th Street corner there. Every different street, you would have a different artist. It was a place you could just walk and look at a singer. If you go up to 4th street, you find Alton Ellis. Delroy Wilson was on 2nd street and we used to pass by just for a glimpse of him."

Musician and singer Percy Williams remembers, "Jah Jerry, Ernest Ranglin, Tommy McCook, Roland Alphonzo, Lloyd Nibbs, Leroy Sibbles and the Heptones,. Al and the Vibrators, Skatalites, you have Toots and the Maytals come off of the same corner – 13th street in Trench Town - we all used to play on the street corner."

Photo: Ossie Thomas with Prince Jazzbo at Tuff Gong

In the 70's, the glory shifted to areas like Greenwich Farm, where Bunny Lee held court, and labels like Freedom Sounds thrived, with Earl Chinna Smith and the Soul Syndicate band backing all the artists. Life was nice in Greenwich Farm. Next to the sea, people could catch fish to feed themselves and string up impromptu guitars with fishing line. While Greenwich Farm wasn't really a big sound system area per se,

it had a reputation as a major musical breeding ground. Jah Stitch's Black Harmony sound had played there in the 70's. In the 80's, Dexter Campbell's Echo Vibration ruled. Greenwhich Farm was where Sammy Dread, Phillip Frazer, Peter Ranking and General Lucky, Michigan and Smiley all got their starts.

Kingston 11, Waterhouse, was becoming popular as a musical base in the 70's, the place where King Tubby was bringing the new musical art called dub to new levels of creativity, and teaching an apprentice, and soon to be King, Prince Jammy.

In the 80's, the focus shifted to Kingston 13. Maxfield Park became one of the biggest music areas of all. "Kingston was like Hollywood," Producer Ossie Thomas explains, "You find stars popping up all over the Maxfield Park area. Like Tristan Palma, Michael Palmer, Lloyd Hemmings, Earl Cunningham…."

Deejay Lady Anne grew up in Maxfield Park. "Where I'm from, [music] was all around- Tristan Palma live across [the street]. Junior Byles in the middle. Mighty Diamonds live at the end. Barry Brown live up at the top. Sugar Minott live up at the top. Dillinger live 'round the corner. Trinity and [Clint] Eastwood live down the block. Lui Lepke down the road. I was surrounded by music."

The area got a big boost in 1979 when the Soul Syndicate band moved in. "The Soul Syndicate- they left Half Road in Greenwich Farm and came to Delamere Avenue," Sugar recalled.

"Chinna [Smith], Santa [Davis, the drummer], [Fully] Fullwood - all those people [were] a great inspiration for us on the corner." Not only did they bring some of the great Greenwich Farm artists with them, but they gave the artists living in the area a chance to rehearse with a real live band, which made all the difference.

Photo: Sugar and friends in Toronto

Sugar's story

Maxfield Park is where Sugar's musical story began. With Maxfield Avenue, home of Channel One, on the east, Waltham Park Road to the West, and Chisholm Avenue to the north Maxfield Park was a fairly large and varied neighborhood containing both commercial and residential streets. Between Chisholm and Maxfield sits Norman Manly High School where most of the area artists went to school.

Lincoln Barrington Minott was born May 25, 1956 in Kingston, Jamaica. He earned the nickname Sugar as a boy for his love of sweets and habit of eating candy. His father, Austin Minott, had come to Kingston from Harker's Hall, a farming village in St Catherine close to the Bog Walk area, and his mother, Lucille Lester, came from Lawrence Tavern, St Andrews. Over her life, Lucille had eight children, three girls and five boys, several of whom joined Sugar later in the music business. Sugar was her only child with Austin. Unhappily, Austin passed away in the early 80's before Sugar had a chance to buy him a house, according to daughter Tamar, "something he always told me he regretted."

Maxfield Park, although a ghetto area, was not the worst in Kingston. But, people were poor. Living on Delacree Road, Lucille was unable, like most downtown residents, to afford a television set. So, Sugar kept his little brothers entertained on a budget. Sugar would cut out the front of a cardboard box and cover it with newspaper. Then he would shine the light from behind as he moved the little cardboard men he cut out and narrated the story. Earl, one of the younger brothers, would watch in awe, admiring his older sibling with his whole heart and soul. "Sugar was the best. He was brilliant at these things."

As young man he went to a trade school to study electronics and worked for a time in a company on Slipe Pen Road where his bigger brother Clive was then employed*. But working in a machine shop just wasn't what he wanted from life. One day, Sugar had enough of the shop and got up and left. He also spent a short

* Never a music person, like the others, Clive is currently working as an engineer. He lives in Florida.

time building shelves, the kind that were used in banks and other work places. But his daughter Tamar recalls, none of it lasted too long, "because he said his calling was for music."

Living next door to a dance hall had a big influence on him in his early years. "I used to keep imitation dance, make cardboard boxes look like speaker box. I used to use those bottle snapper as my turner and my amplifier, with sticks going through them. I used to perform the songs I hear at the dance and then the kids, they used to pay to come in too." Sugar remembers being obsessed with the dance hall throughout his entire childhood. "My mother always tell me that, whenever she want to find me, she just follow the music. Cause she know I'm there. She says I never give her no trouble because I'm always at dance. I never get time to be up to anything."

Despite his easy going nature and natural charm, Sugar did get in trouble to at home occasionally, mainly for sneaking out at night to go to a session. Later on, his mother ran into problems with him cutting school and going to studios. But that was it. Otherwise, he was kind and thoughtful - "caring, loving- he tried to help people", even as a child, according to Sugar's younger brother, Ken. People gravitated to Sugar because, "He was a loving kid and fun to be around."

As a minor, Sugar wasn't allowed officially into dances, but he found ways to infiltrate. "We used to make holes in the dance hall fence, that is, the kids who couldn't go in legally. Pull away

People gravitated to Sugar because, "He was a loving kid and fun to be around."

the fence and go in and you had to watch out for the inspector.

"There was a time when I used to have to pretend that I'm a part of the sound to get in, like trying to carry some small items and stand up beside the sound people, and say I'm a part of it. Sometime it work, [but] then they go around and say, 'Do you know this one?' Sometimes them say, 'Yea, man. Him alright'. Next time them say, 'No, man'".

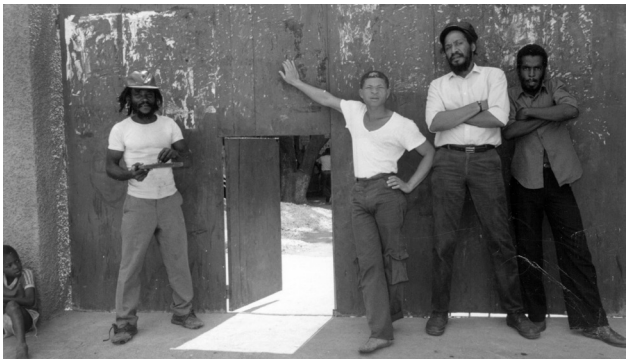


Photo: Bingy Jean to the right of Yellowbird at the Robert Crescent gate

As a youth, Sugar's days were filled with going to school and playing football afterwards. "In the morning, Sugar wake, have a little porridge, cook and eat a little food and thing, and when it comes to 4 o'clock and school over, everybody go and play football. Sugar was the goal keeper. Sugar was a bad goalkeeper, man!" recalls Daddy Ants.

Derrick "Eric Bubbles" Howard remembers playing in those pick-up games. "Sugar was a great footballer. A great gatekeeper [goal keeper]. One of the biggest footballer in Jamaica".

Although he was fascinated with music, and spent his evenings hanging around the dancehall, and weekends entering local talent shows, Sugar's biggest dream at the time was to play football. As yet, he was a bit shy about singing in public.

But one day, Sugar met his Waterloo in a match against the top rated team in Jamaica, Boy's Town. "That was one of the biggest team in Jamaica that time," Daddy Ants recounts. "All the greats used to play for Boy's Town. We were second to Boys town.

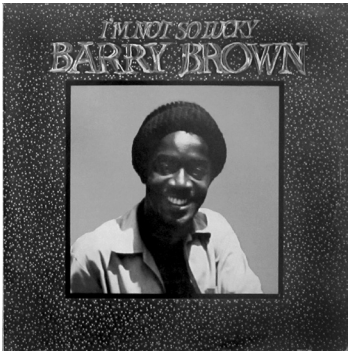
"One day we were playing against Boy's Town club with all of those great guys and they came and they beat us. And the guys say, 'Sugar, you're not supposed to be playing football, you're our singer, come sing some tunes'. And from that day on, from that day on, Sugar just put him head straight to the music."

Delacree Road

Sugar was living on Delacree Road with his mother and siblings. Life wasn't easy in the "13". "Sometimes, in the ghetto where I grow, Maxfield Park, it's a rough ghetto, you know" Sugar recalled. "Lots of people robbing people, and, lots of guns, and, all the bad elements of a project, you know." But the gift of a guitar, from elder deejay Big Youth, kept Sugar safe. "Before I had that guitar, the boys used to try to call me to do all kinda things and I used to have to make a lot of excuse to get out of it. Or some guy would give you a gun and say, 'Stay here and

Photo: Big Youth in front of his store *1982, photo by David Kingston*

watch this place,' and as him turn him back, you gone! Like, 'Oh my mother call me!' And all that. But, when they saw me with this guitar that Big Youth gave me, they didn't bother to do that again. They said, 'This is a singer, man', and they start taking care of me. Bad boy, you know, have a little heart for people who play music. They not going to push you up in no badness."



Musicians were still considered off limits, in those days. They could pass through political areas and remain, officially, neutral. Even if they were identified with a particular side, they were excused because the music was so compelling. As Sammy Dread explains, "In those times, when you stick up an artist, or rob an artist, you were in trouble. A singer was like a god to the bad boys. The artist alone coulda just cool them when the bad man is bad. He go to the dance, he just quiet, he just listen to the music, have a drink and then go home."

There were three main sound systems playing the Maxfield Park area in the 70's, Keytone, Sound of Silence, and, later, Black Roots. Keytone was owned by Sammy Barnett. "Keytone was a beautiful sound," Deejay Daddy Ants remembers. "That was the sweetest sound in the area. Those times Barry Brown was around there too. He used to come a Maxfield Pak every night same way. Barry Brown sing on all of the [sounds]. We [used to] have all competition, you know- Barry Brown against Sugar Minott. Nuff niceness and thing. It wasn't anything vicious. It was just nuff niceness! People used to cheer. Obviously, Sugar was the better singer."

Sound of Silence was owned by a Mr. Ruddy who lives in the US right now (Not the same Ruddy who worked at Joe Gibbs). Sugar, drawn irresistibly to the music, hung around Keytone and Sound of Silence both selecting and singing. Sugar just couldn't resist music. "When I feel the vibes to sing- money, it's nothing," Sugar explained. "You just sing. You don't even know whose dance it is. You just get the mic and sing."

African Brothers

Music became the neighborhood export and the top local activity. Singer Ashanti Waugh recalled how the friends would all gather in a yard or under a shady tree and just harmonize –himself along with Sugar, Buddy Bye, Dennis Reid and Tuffy.

Right at the corner of Delamere Avenue and Delacree Road, in Maxfield Park, was a little bar

Photo:Tony Tuff with Chester Miller in Toronto

owned by a man named Tunny Martin. Every evening, local residents would congregate there to play cards, enjoy a beer, talk and relax. Sometimes they would play football around the back.

One night Derrick Howard, later known as Eric Bubbles, the name that stuck to him when he was in London, was walking in the neighborhood when he heard the sound of a man playing a guitar over by Tunny Martin's corner. He was intrigued by the sweet sound of the melody and was curious who was playing. When he came to the corner, he saw two men sitting together and singing. So, he asked around, "Who is that?" The response came, "It's Tony and Sugar." Tony was the bigger of the two and was playing the guitar. The youth they called Sugar was just a skinny little boy, maybe 14 years old. But he could clearly handle the harmonies and had a smooth voice. So, Derrick asked them if they wanted to record a song. "They never believe me, you know. They see a lot of people tell them lie and nothing

nah gwan," Derrick recalls. He explained to the two young men that he really could back up his words. So Tony Morris [later Tony Tuff] invited Derrick to sit in and help work out the song they were rehearsing. So, Derrick fit himself in on harmonies while Tony remained the lead. The result sounded good to all three so they began rehearsing the song together regularly. "Tony write that song and we work a couple nights – like for a week or two- and we went to Tubby's to voice the song." At first, Sugar was shy. "He wouldn't go up to the mic," Derrick remembers. But they managed to cut their first side, Mystery of Nature, for Rupee Edwards

Derrick already had experience recording. He was then a member of the group, Charles Hanna and the Graduates (C.H. Hanna had the label, Graduate) which included Desi Roots (Desmond Young, now President of the Jamaican Federation of musicians), and Cornell Campbell on guitar. They played the hotel circuit and at clubs, and had made a record with Harry J, Behold I Live. Derrick had also recorded with the In Crowd Band, a tune named Good Samaritan.

Now, with the addition of Derrick, a real group began to take shape. Many afternoons, Tony and Derrick would pick up Sugar after school and take him to the park where they played football, to do a little rehearsing. Oddly, a couple of people had been buried in the park, and the boys would sit on top of the tombs and sing. Soon, they were ready to appear in local talent shows. In 1974, they entered

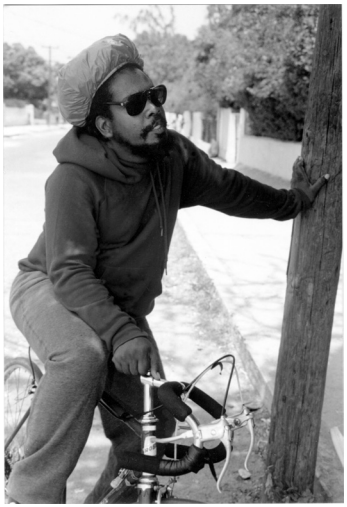


Photo: Tony Tuff lets his Geri Curl set at he roams Maxfield Park

a competition held at the Pink Lady Club on Maxfield Ave and won.

The Trio had a interesting and professional sound. Tony made a solid front man, even at a young age. Their next 45s where recorded for Micron Music. Before the advent of Pete Weston, Micron was run by Ronnie Burke, who now sells insurance, and by Mike Johnson, a dreadlocked white man who opened his heart and his wallet to the three youngsters. Derrick has fond memories of the way he dealt with the newcomers, "The only man we ever get money from is Micron. Every week we would go get money from Mike Johnson. He cone around and check us at nighttime and invite us to his home and we would go up there - New Kingston- and rehearse, and he left to go to the studio and we would have the whole house to we self."

The three followed up the three tunes for Micron with records for several popular producers of the day, Rupie Edwards, Winston "Merritone" Blake, for Clive Chin at Randy's and an eccentric, one- footed man named Jimmy Radway, who enjoyed a short burst of popularity in the 70's, and whose unique rhythms have been preserved on a CD named Dub I, released by Pressure Sounds. Radway, at the time, had the labels Fe Me Time and Capricorn Rising.

The group was supposed to record for Jack Ruby, then at the height of his popularity with his Burning Spear releases. But the day they were scheduled to go to the studio, Ruby took sick and never recovered.

By the mid 70's, disappointed with the financial results of recording for other people, the group began to explore the idea of self- producing, something that several notable artists were doing, including Big Youth, Gregory Isaacs and Dennis Brown. Out of their efforts came Torturing, their biggest hit - although Want Some Freedom and Practice What You Preach were popular as well. Torturing was very well received and sold a good quantity overseas as an import. But due to some discrepancies in the distributor's record keeping, and their loss of control over the original stamper, the group was only paid for 500 copies, according to Derrick. The economic pressure hastened the demise of the trio who were already starting to 'want some freedom' to pursue their own musical ambitions. Besides, the era of the harmony group was drawing to a quick conclusion. The 80's were to be ruled by the solo artist- singers like Barrington Levy, Frankie Paul and Sugar Minott.

Studio One –1975 – 1978

Sugar's first audition with Coxsone Dodd at Studio One was with the group, The African Brothers. Mr. Dodd used to pass by Delamere Ave and heard the band rehearsing, so he knew they had potential. The group managed to record one song for Dodd, No Cup Na Broke, in 1974, before dissolving. The popular, catchy song was made up of folk sayings they might have heard their grandmothers use, "When you are in Rome, do as the Romans do…"
They could have done well at Studio One, but, by then, internal tensions were pulling them

apart and they decided to remain friends, but go their separate ways professionally.

Sugar went back and approached Mr. Dodd, this time as a solo artist. "When I went to audition, everybody was in the yard with guitar, everybody was singing their own little thing and I went to Mr. Dodd and I said, 'Look sir, I don't need no rhythm. I can make song on the same rhythm you have long time, you know.' And him say 'Ehhhhh?' like he was surprised, like he say, 'Yea? That could work.' So, I told him the songs that I had already, and he listen it and he took me round the studio, same time. And after that, he started cutting dubplates for me to go home and practice. Cause he liked the first one that he heard- I did it on a [rhythm of] Leroy Sibbles, Heptone's, Love Me Girl- a song called Wrong Doers."

Studio One's heyday in the rock steady era had passed by then, and Mr. Dodd was feeling around for a new approach that would put him back on top. "At that time, I was like a savior to Studio One, cause, remember, there was no more Ken Boothe, there was no more nobody. It was different. Freddy McGregor was there, Silvertones and some people like that. When I did this thing, it's like a new Studio One started."

Live Loving, the first LP, released in 1979, was a revolutionary change in the way reggae was presented on record. Songs like Live Loving, Love is Gonna Pack Up, Hang On Natty were all sung over classic rock steady rhythms, but the songs were not rock steady songs. Some were rootsy,

like Jah Jah Lead Us. Some were romantic, like A House Is Not a Home. What they had in common is that they were essentially modern songs sung over decade-old, rock steady backing tracks. This would have been nothing out of the ordinary for a deejay in the dance, where the selector would often follow a new hit that was based on an old rhythm, with a Studio One cut of the original version. But as a recording style for singers, it was still experimental. Most studios, like Channel One, cut new versions of the classic rock steady and ska originals, versions that had a modern beat, 'rockers' style'. But to use the same version that the original song was voiced, over ten years before- that was a risk. Coxsone always liked to experiment with something new, so he gave it a try. Sugar carried it off perfectly. Sugar's style of singing was so fresh and original, that he made the old, familiar versions sound new again, as if they were completely different rhythms.

Live Loving, the first LP, released in 1979, was a revolutionary change in the way reggae was presented on record.

The follow up LP, Showcase, also in 1979, strengthened the trend and contained some of Sugar's most powerful and best known work, songs like Vanity and Mr. DC. The album added another dance hall element- it was a showcase album, meaning each song was followed by its respective version, the way it would be presented in a session.

Although he was singing in a dance hall style, Sugar was singing pure roots and culture. In Vanity, for example, Sugar uses nursery rhymes to council against the evils of lusting after material processions, and, in Mr. DC, he reflects the life of the ghetto sufferer who has to sell a little herb to feed his children. Both are sung in that romantic,

crooning style that made Sugar so famous later on the UK Lover's Rock scene.

After sticking with Mr. Dodd for a couple of years, singing solo, filling in on the instruments he played (guitar and drums), and contributing backing vocals, as artists were expected to do in the studios at the time*, Sugar was ready for a change. "It's like being in college," He reflected on the Studio One experience. "After a while you graduate."

Money was also a factor in his desire to move on. "It wasn't nice at Studio One financially. So, I had to leave. I said, 'Look- I'm gonna try something for myself'. Cause I didn't know what studio to go. Cause Channel One, they was kicking, but, that

Photo: Channel One with Thriller and Horace Andy

was the studio that was rival to Studio One, those days. And I was kinda a radical youth who say I never want to sing for a chineyman. So, it was like chineyman studio versus blackman studio, you know, racial shit. When I left Studio One, I couldn't run to those people."

*Freddy McGregor and Tony Tuff sang backup on Live Loving, for example

Eventually, he did record successfully and harmoniously with the Hookim Brothers at Channel One. But first, he had a special vision he wanted to pursue, a vision of forming a co-operative recording operation in which he could both sing and mentor younger artist, all in an organization without a central leader, one in which each contributed what he could and all received equally. He envisioned an organization where the members could maintain control of their own work. Cut out the middle men. The members would see each project all the way through the process from writing and recording to distributing, and avoid all the pitfalls of trusting these to the recording industry establishment.

Robert Crescent 1978–9

Around this time, Sugar's mother moved from Delacree Road to a large old house at 1 Robert Crescent, off Rousseau Road. But Sugar, with his longing to be around music 24 hours a day, had taken up residence at 82 Chisholm Ave, a well known dance hall lawn. Not that he actually moved in officially; he still lived at home, with his mother. Music was always happening at 82 Chisholm Ave. Thus, the 'lawn' became the home base for Sugar and a group of young artists he was attracting. As Ken explains it, "Chisholm Ave is just like a base, like Robert Crescent [became later] where he would hang out with some bredren. 82 Chisholm was a real dancehall. All kinds of sound play there. If Sugar isn't at Robert Crescent, you can check at 82.

Photo: House 1 at Robert Crescent

Cause he had some bredren that live around there. So, maybe he would stay a night or two but he wasn't living there. It was just a base- you can find him there."

Chisholm Ave runs through Maxfield Park down to Waltham Park Road where it becomes Oakland Ave. and continues all the way to Spanishtown Road, the deep ghetto where Junjo Lawes and his Volcano Posse would congregate. Sugar felt more comfortable in these poorer areas, where people could just hang out, and no one was ever pressured for time, and where music was always close by. "My brother was always a ghetto person," brother Earl explains. "Anywhere poor people is, he's always there. He's always just drawn to that kind of people."

Sugar was a born leader and seemed to become a pivotal person in any group. At this time, he was gradually becoming the central figure in the loose association of area artists, mainly youngsters struggling to find a way to get into music. Even back then, in the 70's, Sugar would take in these stray youth the way others take in abandoned cats and lost puppies. Tristan Palma and Little John, both residents of Frog City, as Maxfield Park was referred to in those days, began hanging around. Blacka T, also, spent some time camping out at 82 Chisholm Ave. where Sugar, as young as he remained, was becoming a father to a generation of artists. "I moved and go there in '82, with Little John, Tristan and all those guys. Used to hang around there, sleep there, get up and go to school in the morning. We used to eat our cornmeal porridge or banana porridge in the morning and Sugar Minott used to take us to the store to get the shoes and the school pants and things. Cause we have to learn something. We can't just be there so. Going to school 7:30 in the morning and finish 12:30 and then we would go and do some rehearsal and write some lyrics."

Nobody wanted for anything if Sugar could find a way to supply it. He couldn't help it. That charitable gift was already written in his DNA. "This is the argument me and him have all the while", his brother Earl complained. "He can't be taking in everybody. Can't be taking in every stray. Keep something for yourself. But when you're made a certain way, you can't change it. Cause my mom was like that. Whenever the mad man

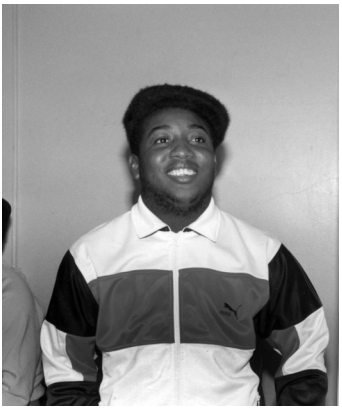


Photo: Little John

used to come around, the first place he would stop was our house. Our house was like a guest house. My friend used to come there, my mom used to cook dinner. My mom was just a lovable person. She was for everybody. No matter who you are. There's no way my mom would tell you can't come in 'cause you're looking scrappy. Even the mad man, my mom used to give them a decent plate."

Still, despite, or perhaps because of his largess, Sugar had very little for himself, and his dream of recording an album with the support of his group of local musicians and artists, remained a distant dream. Then, one day, Sugar was "sitting on a stone, looking desperate", when, as in a fairy tale, some local badmen came by, took pity on him and gave him $800. With this seed capital, he booked some session time at Channel One. "I went to Earl China Smith, Soul Syndicate Band, the band that used to practice on our corner [Delamere Ave], and I told them I had some studio time at Channel One. I bought a tape, and they came and they play a whole album for me for nothing, man, - no money!" The result was the almost zero budget production LP, Ghetto-ology (Trojan 1979). To get anything accomplished in the studio, Sugar had to rely entirely on the good will of his peers and buddies. "People like Barnabas engineer for us day and night, for nothing, sometimes."

The crew had to slip into the studio in the 'off peak' hours. "We guys was going to studio in short pants and bare feet, at night time. We all was going to studio at one o'clock, cause at

that time, everybody gone home so that's when Sugar would voice all his songs, after midnight. So we are the guys that used to spar with him in the night, go to the studio with him. Sometimes we drop asleep and Sugar still working. When we are around him, he's happy," Ants recalls.

Everyone contributed something to the project. Tony Tuff, Tristan Palma, Ashanti Waugh and Little Roy all did backing vocals. Freddy McGregor, Ilawe (Albert Malawe), and Barnabas

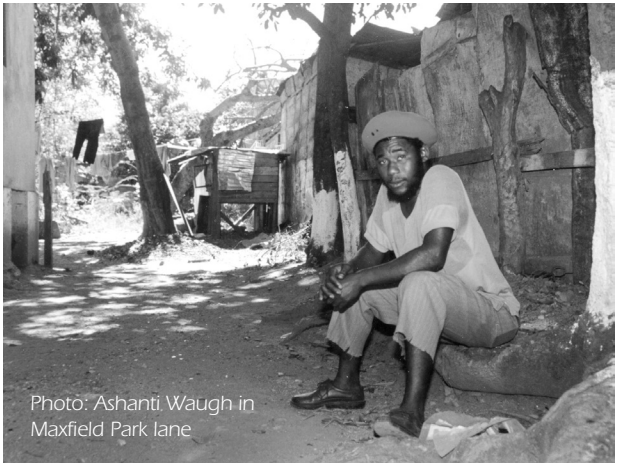


Photo: Ashanti Waugh in Maxfield Park lane

helped out on drums. The resulting album, recorded at Channel One but mixed and voiced at King Tubby's, had a slightly disjointed sound, the mix felt a bit jagged and the vocals had that far away sound. But the quality of the material was enough of a recommendation that Trojan, the UK label, took it for release abroad. It was a brilliant coup for the fledgling crew. The release of Ghetto-ology was followed by Ghetto-ology in Dub. Sugar was able to invest the money that

they made selling the LP to Trojan, directly in a more productions, and into organizing his first artist run cooperative, Black Roots.

Black Roots

"I grew up with some youth in Maxfield Park and we decided to form this thing after leaving Coxsone. Decided to do something for ourselves," Sugar recalled. "Cause there's a lot of singer around the area –Barry Brown, Tristan [Palma]- all of them little youth." With the money he had earned from the first release, Sugar decided to start a label for the cooperative organization that had formed loosely around the creation of Ghetto-ology.

In order to start producing his own material now, Sugar needed a label. "I was thinking, like, if I'm gonna form a label, and I call it 'Sugar Minott', nobody is gonna sing on it, cause they gonna say, ahh, I'm just gonna big me up and they gonna be jealous. What name can I find to unite everybody? You know, everybody was

Photo: Barnabas smoking and drumming at Channel One

talking about African, Rasta thing so I said, Black Roots- cause that's where we all coming from, the roots. And I did the song, 'Black roots is where I'm from…'"

"The first label, is like, I just sit and I got the vision", Sugar explained. "A tree roots with my head on top and when it comes down to my neck, it turns into roots. That was the emblem at first. Then, after that, we had Africa."

Just about the time Sugar left Studio One, he heard a new hit on the radio tearing up the charts, Smiley and Michigan's Rubadub Style, on Studio One. Sugar's first reaction was indignation. "I put out my first number one song [Vanity] and Michigan and Smiley did a version of my song and I was vexed! Cause I just left Studio One with no money. These guys come along, versioning my song. I was mad. So, I went to Channel One to get some time, get Steelie*, (Steelie record his first song for me- the first song he ever played on), with amateur musicians and we went to Channel One and we tried to lay the Studio One rhythm, which was Vanity.** And I sing River Jordon on that, because we wanted to version back Michigan and Smiley. We wasn't going to take it laying down."

River Jordon, on the Black Roots label, was a huge success for the youth. He followed up with the song Man Hungry, again with pick up musicians working almost as volunteers. The reaction was, again, immediate. "[The song] hit number one, man! And out of that, I decide, yea, ok, I'm gonna form a thing called Youth Promotion label and an organization that would

*Steelie Johnson the keyboard player
** Original- I'm Just a Guy by Alton Ellis

Photo: George Wright with Jojo Hookim

be a charity to Black Roots." Ken explained, "In the beginning, Sugar didn't want to be on his own. He wanted artists growing up around him. So, he form this company to work together and help each other." Out of that true community effort that had created Ghetto-ology, the Black Roots/Youth Promotion organization was born. As Daddy Ants recalls, "Out of that, it started a gathering of youth because, as the youth heard that Sugar Minott have a thing over so, you know, on Maxfield Park. Then Tristan Palma start come, then Barry Brown, Rod Taylor. Every youth start come in".

Sugar had a very specific vision to promote the music, and the youth through the music. Living in the ghetto, Sugar was especially cognizant of the way music could mend fences and bring people together. He saw that the young people who were seriously involved in music had no time for petty crime or 'badness'.

Already, many individual artists had broken away from the major studios and gone solo, like Gregory Isaacs with his African Museum label, and Big Youth with Negusa Negast. Other groups of artist were forming collectives, like Augustus Pablo with Rockers.

So, along with a bredren from Harker's Hall, St. Catherines, named James Brown (variously known as Jimmy, Blacka, Nanny or Jimbo), and Keith Hartley, Sugar formed both the labels and organizations, Black Roots and Youth Promotion, in 1979. "Black Roots would be my company and Youth Promotion would be like a charity

Photo: Tristan Palma with Gray in Toronto

organization helping youth in the music. Cause everybody start checking me now and we became a gathering. After Little John, Tristan, then comes Yammie Bolo, growing up from a little youth, Tenorsaw, Nitty Gritty… After the gathering of the youth was there, I figure, wow, this is youth promoting themselves without no Coxsone, no Joe Gibbs, no Channel One- just us. For the first time, young artists are gonna be their own bosses, do what we like, although we never know the business so much. And we made tons of hits!"

The follow up album, also in 1979, was a somewhat rough masterpiece, Black Roots. Some of Sugar's clearest, cleanest, most elegant roots material appears here- songs like the hit, Hard Time Pressure, the up-tempo Mr. Babylon man, the smooth and mellow River Jordon and the sentimental, love ballad, Two Time Looser. All were produced by Sugar utilizing a hodgepodge of different musicians and engineers. Mango, Island Record's US branch, was impressed. Lister Hewan-Lowe, a New York

area disc Jockey, who was working with Mango Records at the time, ran into Sugar when Sugar was taking his new LP, Black Roots around to various record companies and distributors. Hewan-Lowe was so impressed with the work, he told the Jamaican Gleaner, in an interview, "It was an amazing album. It was like a hit record. The way [Sugar] looked, the way he sounded was just different."* Mango took this second effort for release in the US, which gave Sugar more funds to plow back into his Jamaican base.

The disc jockey/A&R man was right. Sugar was different. There was something refreshing and satisfying about his music. A skinny little ghetto boy at the time, with a missing front tooth, Sugar had nothing special to recommend him but an exceptional voice and a vision that involved not just himself, but his whole community.

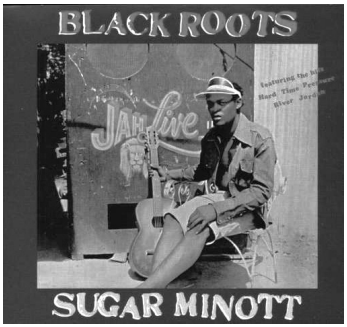
To continue to raise funds, Sugar recorded an album for King Jammy, Bitter Sweet, released on Gorgon in Jamaica in 1979. The LP was picked up by United Artist and released as Give the People, re-titled after the most powerful track, a plea for justice in the ghetto set to a heavy Jammy's mix, complete with swirling phasers. The other key track was I'm Not for Sale, both a love and a roots song, Sugar signature style. Sugar had to keep recording for other producers to maintain a cash flow for his pet projects. It was a struggle every day. Sugar was the first to admit that, even at his best, he was not a businessman and had trouble keeping track of the various debts and incomes, especially with his active life and extensive commitments.

*Sugar Minott Was Unique, Jamaican Gleaner July 13, 2010, Howard Campbell

Photo: Barry Brown

To further increase the funding, and to fulfill yet another lifelong dream, for his next venture, Sugar decided to build a sound to promote the artists and the music. Together with Jimmy and other Maxfield Park residents, he brought out Black Roots sound *. When the local artists saw the work that Sugar was doing, they started coming in their tens of thousands. Artists like Captain Sinbad, Little John, Tony Tuff, Barry Brown, Rod Taylor, Michael Prophet, Ashanti Waugh, Freddie McGregor, Casseyman,

* According to an interview Sugar did with Carter Van Pelt in Wax Poetics # 43, 2010, the sound was called Jah Live originally. It was a small local Maxfield Park set. Then it was re-born as Black Roots. The boxes can be seen on the Black Roots LP cover.



Daddy Ants, Barnabas, Michael Ashley, Tristan Palmer, Don Carlos, among others, began to show up. Now there were three main sound systems playing, along with some smaller ventures, like Wisdom Sound, all compressed into a small section of Kingston. Jah Mikey, who worked with all the sounds, recalled, "Sound of Silence used to play Thursday go right back to Sunday, so we would catch a practice there. Keytone, now he plays Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, all in the Maxfield Park area. Black Roots now- as long as Sugar was there, music play, so Black Roots play every night."

Two of the original key players were a very young Tristan Palma and an equally beanie Little John. Sugar believed in their talent, although they themselves where just developing it. He carried them all over with him, to dances, to sessions, and home to the headquarters, in both, bringing out skills they hardly knew they had, and giving them exposure that would later on, attract other producers.

Little John and Tristan Palma

Tristan and Little John were there from the start, hanging out at 82 Chisholm Ave with the big boys and following Sugar to dancehall sessions. Sugar always liked to have people around, so he never went anywhere without a little 'prento' or a close bredren tagging along. Besides, he liked to encourage his protégés to perform, to both develop their skills and impress the crowd. "Well, Sugar had me and Little John

up him sleeve," Tristan explains with a smile. "We go to dance a lot. Nuff dance! He never really go nowhere and leave Tristan and Little John."

They also came with him to the studio where even the youngest could fit in singing harmony. "Tristan Palma used to sing like Sugar," Daddy Ants recalls. "One time you used to hear Tristan Palma sing, you would think it was Sugar Minott singing. Tristan Palma sing a whole heap of harmony from when he was young, like on Ghetto-ology".

It was Sugar who convinced Little John, then an aspiring deejay, to try singing. "I go check Sugar Minott as a deejay, not a singer" Little John remembers. "My voice sound like a real baby. That was like 8 years of age really. And me go check him as a deejay, and him say to me, 'You don't have the voice of a deejay, you supposed to be singing'."

Photo: Tristan with Chester Miller

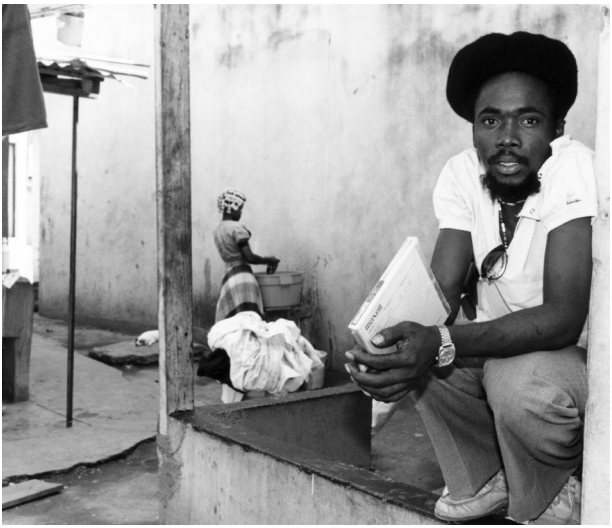


Photo: Daddy Ants

In the meantime, Sugar did find a small space for him in a song by Captain Sinbad, '51 Storm Me Never Born, which appeared on the version side of River Jordan. "The kid that is bringing Captain Sinbad in at the start of that song is Little John. But his voice is so fine! [thin]," Sugar recalls. "So, I couldn't give him more than just to say that in the front and then, in the middle, he come in with 'Go there, Sinbad, go there'. And that's the first song he ever went on.

So, after that, I told him, you know, your little voice is like Michael Jackson man. So, maybe if you try to sing….. His voice so fine, you couldn't even hear what he's saying, man!"

That was the start of Little John's recording career, and his last 45 as a deejay. Sugar was right about the voice, and Little John switched very successfully to singing, becoming a top dance hall vocalist and one of reggae's most dynamic stage performers.

Photo: Tristan and Dave Kingston in Maxfield Park with Buddy Bye and Ashanti Waugh

With Sugar, every spare moment of every day was devoted to music. Local singer Ashanti Waugh, one of the early Black Roots members, recalls how he and Sugar used to go and "Dig Tristan Palma out of school, carry him gone a studio," sometimes until, or even at, 1 in the morning. Or they would all sit under a tree and sing the whole afternoon and well into the evening.

Tristan, like Little John, interned with Sugar Minott, who produced his first LP, Presenting, on the Black Roots label. "Tristan Palma is singing on my album, Ghetto-ology, carrying harmony as a little boy," Sugar explained. "He was a little youth that used to hang around while we were practicing." But Sugar was willing to give him a try doing back up on the album. Even Sugar was impressed with the result. "He's born like that. I didn't teach him no harmony. He knew it. It was an inborn thing."

Tristan remembers getting to work with the African Brothers when he was just a little boy, "Sugar was living in the area where I was living, Sugar and Tony Tuff. They used to sing as African brothers.

And them call me to do harmonies and do all them things for them. I was a person who was really born a natural singer, but, you know, you need guidance from the bigger ones who really know certain way. I was born with that gift to sing. But certain things that I know in the music, I learn it through Sugar Minott, Tony Tuff."

Sugar also used to find excuses to go around to Tristan's yard. Tristan's sisters, not Tristan, at the time, were actively looking for a boost in the business. Sugar would go over to the yard to check them. "They wanted to sing," Sugar recalls, "but we just wanted to look at them, you know. Tristan Palma is very handsome, right, so his sisters, they were beautiful!"

Ossie Thomas, of the Black Solidarity label, also lived in the Maxfield Park area, Kingston 13. Ossie had been watching Tristan and was ready to take him into the studio. But, Bunny Lee got there first and recorded Love is a Message, for his Justice label.

"You see, what really happen now is we was Black Solidarity, that was Delamere Avenue. And Tristan live down the road from me. We used to start talk to Tristan, 'Yea, a time fe you start cut records'. [But] Bunny Lee took him to the studio first and we took him after and release Spliff Tail. And from we release Spliff Tail- that was history. It start mash up the whole place"

The combination was as smashing success. Spliff Tail was just the launching pad for a series of hits that shot Tristan to the top of the charts in Jamaica many weeks running – I'm Ready, Trash and Ready a the new Stylee, What a Bubbling, Dance Hall Fan. The girls, especially, loved Tristan's high, smooth, youthful voice and admired his fine features and delicate stature. The men responded to his topical subject matter, his dance hall vocals, and the strong rhythms he was given to sing over.

Reggae music, in the late 70's, was still dominated by the cultural climate.

With all this glory, who would have thought that Tristan's biggest songs were still to come? "Ossie Thomas did a lot of number one work with me," Tristan recalled. "Then Jah Thomas drop in the picture - Thomas just come take over!"

At the time, Junjo Lawes already had Barrington and wasn't looking for a singer. But deejay/ producer Jah Thomas was. Thomas knew the dance hall vibe better than almost any producer around, having spent so many years deejaying in the dance himself. Beginning in 1982, under Jah Thomas's guidance, Tristan recorded the song that has come to be called the dance hall anthem, the 45 that best represented everything pre-digital dance hall was all about, both musically and lyrically, Entertainment. "No bother fight ina the dance, dance, dance. We come fe enjoy we self…."

Tristan was happy working with Thomas and always spoke well of their relationship. The pair enjoyed another string of hits including songs like Joker Smoker, Young Lover, Give Me a Chance (fe nice up the dance), and Reggae Taking Over.

To England and Lover's Rock 1979–82

Reggae music, in the late 70's, was still dominated by the cultural climate. "Everything was revolutionary, like Dr Alimontado, Jah Woosh, Prince Far I, Big Youth - they were the people who were ruling. Pure deejay like that," Sugar explained. "I always wanted to make soft kinda songs, but every time I go in the studio, them say, 'Naaaahhh man! You a sell out the reggae'. I went with these soft tune arrangements - like R&B, lovers- and I never get to record it. [They say] 'Naaahhhh man! That cyaan work, man! That too soft!'

So, when problems arose in the Black Roots organization, Sugar decided to take a break and travel to England where his music was already popular. In England, Sugar felt freer to experiment, to get away from the ghetto vibes and the roots material people expected of him, and unleash a bit of his inner soul man. "When I went England, I was more relaxed [about doing] all these songs that I wanted to make in Jamaica. Cause, I'm a ballad singer originally. I'm from Nat King Cole, Johnny Mathis, Sam Cooke. That's where I'm coming from – in Motown, Philadelphia. I'm a guy who like cool music. Don't like nothin' too rough.

"When I went to England now, this was my opportunity to do the things I wanted to do while recruiting some young musicians. The studio I went to Easy Street studio. I was the

first person to do reggae in that studio. It was a punk rock studio. And we just took a chance by checking the youth- 'Can we use the studio?' And they say, 'Yea, mon, you can use the studio'. We went there and made 4 #1 hits the same night. I say, 'Ok, this is a new style. This is lover's rock'. From that lover's rock thing, everybody's taking off it- Sandra Logan, Carol Thompson, Winston Reedy. Everything started out of that."

The 45, Lover's Rock, was his biggest song so far. "That was my first break. It sell about 20,000 copies." The song was recorded in the UK, away from the pervasive cultural influences he felt were keeping him back in Jamaica. Inspired by the success of the 45, Sugar released the odd little LP, Roots Lovers, which contained bits from all over, giving it a scattered, somewhat confusing, inconsistent feel. It included a Studio One Track, My Love is True, two cuts from

Photo: Sugar sings and plays piano in Channel One

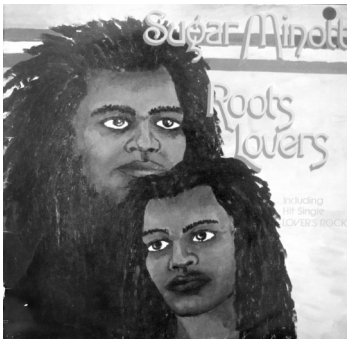
Channel One, My Devotion and Jah Got the Handle, One made in New York with Jackie Mittoo and Peter Chemist, Living a Rough Ole

Life and another one recorded in the UK and voiced at King Tubby's, Death Trap.

Ballad and middle- of- the- road types of material had always existed in the UK, as elsewhere. But Sugar managed to raise the standard of love songs and bring the genre to a new audience. Although his lyrics were about love, but the rhythms were real, solid, hard core reggae, nothing soft, soulful or disco influenced.

At the time, reggae fans were listening to deejays and heavy rhythms, all of it made in Jamaica. Music recorded abroad held a stigma of being second class, derivative, not the genuine article. Sugar challenged that stereotype. Easy Street became a hub of activity in developing Sugar's blend of roots and ballad style reggae and the studio that proved music made abroad could work as authentic reggae. Sugar Minott, Carol Thompson, Winston Reedy, Black Slate all recorded there, and English fans, as well as fans around the world, bought the records.

During his time abroad, Sugar recorded some top sellers, hits like Good Thing Going, a cover of the Michael Jackson b side, which broke the British rock charts coming in at #3 in 1981. Due to Sugar's mellow voice and the stylish production, the song appealed to a broad range of people, and became the rallying cry for a new, uniquely British genre of reggae that also mixed yard and foreign sensibilities. The 45 did so well that the major label, RCA, picked up the LP for distribution all over Europe.



In the meantime, the singer released a cover of David Gate's Make It With You (a duet with Carroll Thompson). Keeping with the lover's rock vein that was increasingly popular in Britain, Sugar worked with several young artists, including Janet Kay, Al Thompson, and Trevor Hartley. He also discovered the ultimate youth band, Musical Youth, who had international success with Pass the Dutchie, based on the Mighty Diamond's Pass the Kutchie.

Although his stay in the UK was certainly successful, somehow it was a hollow victory. Sure, he was making music- and money, as well as helping new singers. But he knew that where he was really needed was at home, and he longed to go back and start all over again, fresh. He was starting to get the reputation of being a balladeer, and he knew that, deep inside, he was still a ragamuffin from the ghetto, and there was so much more he could be doing. "I never wanted to be like Beres Hammond or Gregory Isaacs, like to say, 'Oh, he's a lover's singer'. Beres Hammond is a great singer, one of the greatest voice, but his songs is the same. He's not going to care about the plight of the people. He's gonna care about his career and how much hits he could make. I'm from where I care about my people and use reggae music as a medium to send my message instead of just making some money. I have a job to do."

Ossie Thomas recalled, "Through Sugar's success in England with Good Thing Going, he had some money now to come back now and set up his little stable of artists." So, in 1982, Sugar left

the Lover's Rock scene behind, and returned to Jamaica to go on with the work of training the youth. "I was voted the King of Lover's Rock in England 1979," Sugar recalled. "And then, when I came back to Jamaica, it was dance hall again."

Dance Hall Again 1982

Sugar returned to Jamaica in 1982 with Carol Thompson in tow and did some producing before moving on to his roots work Carol even lived with the crew in Robert Crescent, along with Bertie Grant, engineer and Sugar's good friend from the UK, who later worked on the UB 40 LP. In the meantime, Coxsone Dodd had released an album of Sugar's previous Studio One material that included Wrong Doers and Party Time. The songs were classic mellow Sugar, but somehow the LP still felt like leftover tracks. Good stuff, but not his very best.

Even before Sugar left Jamaica for the UK, conflicts had been arising in Black Roots. "I was having a

Photo: Sugar singing live on the sound in Toronto

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lot of problems here, cooperation of certain artists and things. Having an organization like this takes a lot of strain. There comes artists that- if I wasn't a singer it would be alright- but, since I am a singer, there comes certain prejudices. Some of them always trying to compete. Like, [they think] if they give me songs, I would promote me more than themselves. That's what they think. So, I went to London to try something new with a different set of people."

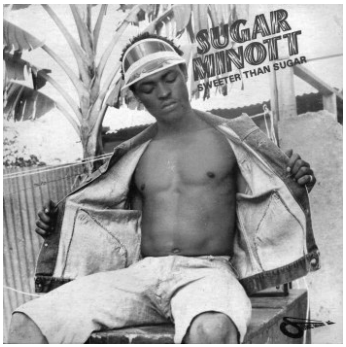
Then a contention arose when Sugar was abroad and began sending things home for the Maxfield Park youth. Daddy Ants recalled, "Jimmy was the big guy for Black Roots in those times. There was a friction between Jimmy and the youths, because Sugar used to send down a lot of things for the youths, but obviously the youth didn't get them. Jimmy take them and give them to his friends. And Sugar didn't like that. Sugar get vex. So, that make Sugar now stop send down things fe them, stop link with them. So, it happen that a big argument start."

Photo:Daddy Ants helps with the Youth Promotion wash

The Black Roots cooperative seemed to have reached the end of the road, at least in terms of being a youth cooperative. The sound remained and continued on, without Sugar, until the mid eighties. The label also remained and Sugar took it over and began developing a catalogue.

During the days, the crew was back to hanging out at 82 Chisholm Ave. "We deh a Chisholm Avenue most of the time, me and Patson." Jah Mikey remembers. "Me and the [Mighty] Diamonds, Ken Booth and Jack Sour. That's where we used to hang out a daytime and smoke chalice and cook food. Sugar elder bredren name Patson used to hold it down now. Him have some wrappings pon him feet. Ken Booth used to live next door. We used to hang out and then [go to] dance later -and I tell you man, them beat down the fence, man!"

During the three years he lived in the UK, Sugar had returned frequently to record. While he was still officially aboard, the album African Girl was released, in 1981. The title track saw Sugar, at his best, mixing romance and culture in one song. African Girl was a love song, addressing his "little African Girl", and an appeal to cultural identity, as he singles out his "African" girl from among the many possible girls in the world. Sugar had been in the UK, working at the Easy Street Studio with singer Trevor Hartley and staying at the same house. Trevor explained to Ray Hurford in an interview, "I tell you something, when he released African Girl, the picture on the front was from the wall. There was a picture on the wall and he took a liking to it. That was where he got the



inspiration for African Girl. And he also used the picture on the wall for the album cover." Recorded over a swinging Shank I Sheck version, the song was hardy and fresh, with sweet harmonies and Sugar's relaxed, but strong, vocals leading the way. The same year, the LP Sweeter than Sugar was released by Hummingbird Records in the US and Sonic Sounds in Jamaica, to a fairly indifferent reception. There was far better Sugar material out there and much more to come.

Channel One

On nights when they weren't beating down the fence at a dance, Sugar and his crew were in the studio. The mob from Chisholm Avenue would move into Channel One, taking over the late night shift. Channel One was the still the happening place for making heavy rhythms, and it was close to his Maxfield Park home base. Plus, you could always work a deal with the owners- a little work in exchange for studio time. So, Sugar voiced songs for the Hookims and, in exchange, got time (often odd hours like late at night until first thing in the morning) to use the facilities for his own purposes. Thus, Sugar recorded Lover's Race and No Vacancy, both produced by Niney the Observer who was working as the in-house producer for the Hookims. In 1983, Channel One released a full LP, With Lots of Extra.

Inspired by the increasing ubiquity of the dance hall culture, Sugar released Dancehall showcase, his 10" EP that contained 4 songs and 4 versions. "That was a dubplate kinda

thing. I got that idea from the dubplates, cause they had 4 [cuts] on each side [two songs with two versions]. And I wanted to put out 4 song at one time." Sugar's dance hall style material was beginning to appear on this release with the songs Dance Hall Style and Nice it Up. A second volume came out a year later on Black Roots in Jamaica and Wackies in New York.

Sugar was beginning, in earnest, to build up a catalogue of Black Roots releases. One of the men who saw him though this period and supported him along the way, was Peter Chemist. Although Chemist still sees Sugar as the one who gave him his break into the business, Sugar couldn't have done it all without the support of the talented and innovative young engineer.

The 15 year old Donovan Thompson had been working a few random shifts at Channel One, and had gotten called in to engineer on a couple of Sugar's songs including Lover's Race. That's how they met. Chemist recalls, "And from there we kinda hit it off, cause being as young as I was, I guess he saw a lot of potential in me. I didn't think much of it. I was like a kid in a candy store, getting to work with all these big artists. I didn't care about money. I'm meeting all these superstars"

Together they worked on the album for Jojo Hookim, With Lots of Extra (Hitbound 1983), with the song No Vacancy, one of Sugar's classic sufferer's laments

"I wake up in the morning
I make an early tracksing

"A job me gone seeking

The youth them need feeding

But everywhere you go it's no vacancy

They mus' be wan' me commit robbery

Everywhere you go it's no vacancy

Tell me how me a go feed me pickney"

A job me gone seeking
The youth them need feeding
But everywhere you go it's no vacancy
They mus' be wan' me commit robbery
Everywhere you go it's no vacancy
Tell me how me a go feed me pickney"

Whereas other singers might call down the 'Babylon' system as unjust, Sugar sang from his heart, as a family man struggling, to maintain his wife and kids- a universal plea. In his lyrics, Sugar described in detail the challenges of trying to survive in the Jamaican urban ghetto, an environment of occasional inspiration mixed with soul crushing hardship. Each of Sugar's roots songs was a two and a half minute portrait of a small person with a pressing problem and nowhere to go for help but the Almighty.
It took Sugar and Chemist a few false starts before they began their collaboration. One night Chemist took his friend who lived on the next street, Trevor Junior, to Channel One with him. "We were just in the studio monkeying around and I hear a rhythm track and I came up with a little melody. I gave him the lyrics and I said, 'Come on, sing this'. And I gave [the tape] to Sugar and I said, 'You know what, I have a little singer, and you going back to England, see what you can do with this guy'". Sugar didn't seem too interested, but Chemist tried again. "I met him again after that, and this time he said, 'Oh, you [were] serious?' And I gave it to him and the song did well in England."

As a youth just starting out, Chemist was available, and Sugar, with his ability to seek

out talent, regarded him as a youth full of potential as an engineer. And Chemist just loved being around Sugar in the studio. There was definitely a 'chemistry' between them. Daddy Ants recalled, "When Sugar went to the big studios like Channel One, Jammys – he always take Peter Chemist with him. So, anywhere he wants to work, he book his own engineer. Peter Chemist was with Sugar from a little boy, man. Sugar bring him in the business and taught him the business."

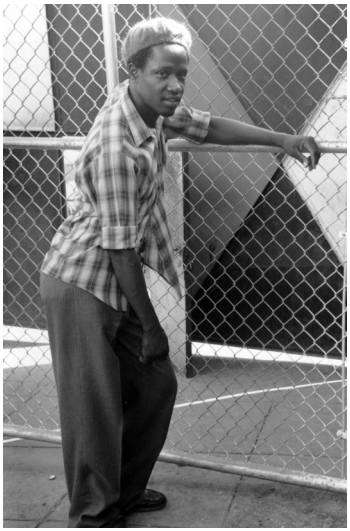


Photo:Trevor Junior at Channel One

"We had a vibes together, me and Sugar," Chemist explains. "I would also help select some of the tracks [on the LPs] for him. After that, I wanted to do my own little productions. I let him hear some tracks and he selected what he wanted. I did stuff for other producers, like Clive Jarrett, back in the days, and they would give me a cut of their rhythm track. That's how I put together that album with Sugar."

That album, Sufferer's Choice, saw Sugar further defining himself as an independent artist, creating his own sound and moving away from his association with Lover's Rock. Sugar was returning to his roots. The title track, Sufferer's Choice, pretty well summed up his situation as an artist/ producer. Over an updated Girl I Love You* rhythm, Sugar explains how he manages to make music, despite his economic constraints, by relying on friends and keeping things simple.

"Don't have no money to dub on the strings
Can't afford synthesizer or expensive things
I-man can't even afford to pay the horns- man
And I surely want them to blow on my song

*1974, Horace Andy Channel One

But right now, this a sufferer's choice
but the riddim still nice , Jah Man….
The drum and the bassman them a me friend
And the guitar and the piano man, they pass
though now and again…"

"It's not hard to see, the love that dwell in me

But this life is not for me

With war and injustice

Love seems to be in vain

I can't stand the pain

Babylon no bother mash up me life"

The album alternates between love songs, some brought back from England, with Sugar's new Jamaican roots material. What unified the album was Sugar's vocal style, his smooth singing over some rough rhythms. The most celebrated song from the album remains Rough Ole Life, also referred to also as Babylon, in which he sings out his pain with a gentleness that expresses sadness much more than anger at his situation. The sweet, soothing harmonies belie the serious nature of the message. It was a perfect example of Sugar's ability to make even the harshest reality lyrics sound like a lover's lament

Rough….. tough…….
Babylon you just a mash up me life (4 x)
Yea-a-a,We're living a rough ole life
Starvation, tribulation, trying to keep a good man down
We're living a rough ole life ……
Still I keep my vision of being in Jah Jah's kingdom
It's not hard to see, the love that dwell in me
But this life is not for me
With war and injustice
Love seems to be in vain
I can't stand the pain
Babylon no bother mash up me life,
Babylon no bother mash up me life ….

Taking the Ghetto Uptown describes Sugar's fantasy of having all the people living in the one room shacks of Kingston, down below the Torrington Bridge, taking their meager belongings and marching into the uptown areas and taking over,

I had a vision just the other day, here what I say
I saw children playing in the street, children rocking to the beat-
They're taking the ghetto uptown
They're tired of being on the ground
Sight Sister Mary in her old tear up frock
With her last boy pon her back
They're taking the ghetto uptown
They're tired of being on the ground

"So, we did that album together," Chemist explained. "I produced half of the album and I basically mixed the whole thing. There was one of the tracks that we had we had a problem with – Taking the Ghetto Uptown. I didn't have a chance to transfer the rhythm track, so I had to record it on the guys them tape and they didn't want it give me back the song. So, Sugar had to sing a song for them," Peter Chemist explains with a laugh. "A little bit of blackmail." Sufferer's Choice, although made on borrowed time, and coming from disparate sources, none the less, made an impressive impact, enough to be taken up by Heartbeat Records in the US.

Dubplates

When Sugar first recorded Rough Ole Life for Jojo Hookim at Channel One, he understood that he was making a dubplate that the studio could sell to various sounds. So, he was surprised to see it come out on record. "Those were sound songs", Sugar recalled. "When sound want that song in Jamaica, I just sing that song for the sound. Now, Jojo from Channel One start to release them on records. They wasn't made for records."

"When sound want that song in Jamaica, I just sing that song for the sound.

It wasn't an isolated event. Channel One had shelves lined with two track tapes containing recordings to cut dubs from. Rather than watching them sit around, Jojo Hookim decided to release them. The problem was, a lot of those recordings were rough mixes, not a final, finished product. What was on the two track tape was the original take, with a quick mix done on the spot. Like the Dennis Brown hit, Hold On to What You Got. Sugar explains, "Dennis Brown was in the studio and Sly was playing it and Dennis Brown was just singing it for the joke of it. He was supposed to go back to voice, but he never go back to voice it. They just use that voicing and it's still a hit anyway."

"[Those songs] Dennis Brown did, Have You Ever, and Revolution, those two tracks, if you listen them close, it was a rough voice," U Brown explains further. "Dennis Brown never voice the song properly, it was a guide voice, like when you are laying down the tracks, you let the musicians hear and they lay it down to fit

Photo: Dennis Brown

your voice. In today's world, they make the 'beats' [rhythm track] first and they write things to fit the beats. But back in the days, you sing, you bring it to the producer, if it sounds OK, they get the musicians to work the chords out".]

To patch up the Dennis Brown cut's underworked production and voicing, Jojo added thick backing vocals. "It so happen that Dennis had such a brilliant voice that Dennis talking to you, and you record it and I put a rhythm to it, it would be a number one," U Brown adds. But, the deejay still took his two tracks out of the studio where he had been storing them between sessions.

Peter Chemist

Sometimes, in Kingston's small and intimate musical world, connections come about in unexpected ways. Thus, it happened that a very young Donovan Thompson used to accompany his mom early in the morning to her place of

employment, Channel One Studio, one block away from where they lived, where she cleaned the studio before the musicians came in to work.

Unofficially, however, Channel One was a 24 hour, round the clock operation, with a lot of producers coming in late and working through until the next Day. These were the cut price hours. So, there was a lot for the little boy to take in as he helped his mother clean, like the raucous Volcano all nighters with Junjo's wild boys, deejays Lui Lepke, Lee Van Cliff and Toyan, with the Roots Radics Band and Scientist engineering. The party would still being going on the following morning, and little Donovan would try and hide in shame, embarrassed to be seen by his heroes as the son of the cleaning staff.

Even as a young boy, Chemist was powerfully drawn to music and took advantage of this opportunity, listening carefully to every engineer. When he had the chance, later in the day, he would return to Channel One and try to slip in to watch. "I used to look around and try to see everybody – Soljie, Barnabas, Bunny Tomtom,… I tried to pick and see what they did and then I could incorporate that into my little thing." Not everyone welcomed his interest. "I got run out of the studio a lot of times. But a lot of engineers know I work there cleaning the studio, and [know me] as a youngster who was eager. When Scientist was doing a session, he would teach me how to mic the instruments, like mic the drum set. It was help for him also, cause when he would be trying to do a session with 7 or 9 guys waiting on you, so [you] could make some money and go home. I kinda catch on fast".

Chemist little dreamed, at the time, that he would be a world renowned engineer himself one day. Who would have thought that a child of the cleaning staff would be 'at the controls', turning the knobs and moving the levers. "As A little kid growing up in the 80's, I was motivated to become somebody in the business, but I didn't think I was gonna go as far as I did. If you had told me back in the early 80's that I would be a known person in the business, I would have [dismissed] the idea- 'yea, whatever!' You know? Cause you coming from nothing, you're not used to much. So, you work at it. Sometimes people put you down- and that's when I met Sugar. He's the one that take me to the next level."

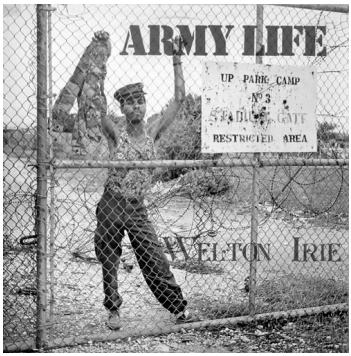
Photo: Junjo's Wild Boys

Before meeting up with Sugar, Chemist proved himself by surprising producer Tanka. Tanka was working on Welton Irie's 45. Army Life, on the Johnny Dollar rhythm. Chemist explains, "That was the very first song that I mixed. I left school around '82, and I used to clean the studio and I was learning from Scientist. One night- do you remember a producer named Tanka? Well, as little kid growing up, and he used to say, 'Go 'way, you dirty foot bwoy!' and I would say, 'I'm gonna mix your first number one!' And he would say, 'Move from there! You can't mix no sound!' I would say, 'Your first number one song, I'm gonna give it to you'.

"Back then, everybody wants to make the most of their dollar. So, if they book a session, they want to lay the rhythm track. They want to voice the song, mix it – so we can be out in like one day. So, one night I was there with him- all I ever wanted to do was just learn, so I was never

tired. He was there and he kind of fell asleep. So, I said to him, "Do you want me to go ahead and mix this song?" I kept bugging him, kinda pissing him off a little, cause he's trying to get a couple of zzzz's in. And he's like, 'ahhhhh, go ahead…' I kept asking him, 'How this sound?' and he was like '….I know…', cause he wanted to sleep, so he was just saying yes to everything I was doing. So, I stopped bugging him and I just went ahead and did my stuff. You know how you can feel when somebody is staring at you? I was around the board mixing and I kinda felt it, and I looked to my left and he sit up in the chair

Photo:Peter Chemist
Photo courtesy of Pekka Vuorinen



and he was just looking at me doing what I was doing! And I stopped, and I was like, 'Am I doing something wrong?' and he said to me, 'Did you balance this song?' - you know, add the voice and the drum and bass in the rhythm track. And he said, 'Did you really do this?' and I said, 'Yea'. And then he came up and sat beside me and he gave me a lot of little tips. And that was the first song I mix and it went straight to number one. That was how I got started."

Chemist found himself filling in at Channel One more and more often because he was one block away and could be called in any emergency. "I could walk to work and that's how I got to do a lot of my sessions. The engineer wouldn't turn up, they were like, 'Oh that one's down the lane there'. Everybody would come and get me."

Sugar and Chemist became close in a short time. Sugar became a mentor, teacher, father, bigger brother for the youth. There were serious times, working times, and times for fun, sometimes all at once. "Sugar used to get me up so early in the morning. There was one song where he says, "Chemist! Go wash your face!', cause I fell asleep around the mixing board. And they caught it on tape. So, anytime I am going anywhere, it's like [people call out], 'Chemist Go wash your face!'" Sly left it in the mix, so the cut, Herbman Hustling, still has the scolding.

One day Sugar surprised Chemist with an offer to take him abroad. "He was like, 'You know what, you got a lot of potential. I'm gonna take you to foreign. You need to go to foreign'. I was

CHANNEL ONE
RECORDING STUDIO
29 Maxfield Avenue, Kingston 13, Jamaica
PRESSURE SOUNDS

like 'whatever'. You know, people saying stuff [they don't mean] all the time."

But Sugar did mean it. He saw something in the young engineer that Chemist himself hardly dared to see. "I was like a barefoot kid from off the street. All the big producers. They're not gonna let me touch their stuff. I remember a producer told me, 'Come out the studio!' I remember certain people, I'm not even going to call their names, tell me to get out, while the other engineers tell him that I work there. For Sugar to have the confidence in me as a young kid- you don't even know the half of it. I was on Cloud 9."

Sugar came through on his promise and took him over to England. "First time I went to England it was 1983. That was when we did the Sufferer's Choice album and he wanted to tour to promote the album. We toured Europe and I came back home just before my birthday in April." *

Just before he left, Chemist was advised not to go. "I was told I was going to make a big idiot of myself, I was gonna embarrass myself." The dire warning came from his boss at Channel One who clearly did not want to lose an engineer, even for a few months. "I was told, at age 16,

* He was born April 13, 1967

'You're gonna go embarrass yourself'. I said, 'I wanna see what it's like out there. I'm not gonna turn down my first opportunity to travel, to see somewhere else. So, I left, and when I came back [to Channel One] they said, 'We don't want you here'. They fired me."

Photo: Don Carlos and Gold

George Phang came to the rescue and scooped up the new engineer to work with him on his material. "He had a song for Michael Palmer, Dem a Lickshot, and he said, 'I would like you to mix it'. So, I went to Dynamic [Sound Studio]. My first song when I came back went straight to number one!"

After that, Dynamics made a bid for his services. But as soon as Jojo Hookim got wind of that, he sent for Peter and gave him his old post back. But Chemist didn't stay there long. In 84, he left again, this time to accompany Sugar on his tour of Japan.

The tour, with the Black Roots Band, included Don Carlos and Gold and Junior Reid, headlined by Sugar, who carried Chemist along as the man in charge of mixing the music. Peter is still amazed at his good fortune. "I just sit back and I remember all the good he has done for me as an individual and believing in me. Can you believe at age 17, I'm in Japan? All these Japanese people are looking at me like I'm the one doing the sound? They could not believe at my age. They said people would take 10 years to learn what I know. But it's all because of his teaching."

In 1984, when Sugar took his Black Roots band with him on his first tour of Japan, he never expected to be a dance hall pioneer. Reggae was a huge and growing industry in the Far East. Not only where they importing records, but home grown units were trying desperately to make authentic Jamaican sounding reggae. Especially after the digital revolution.

One particular reggae artist, a youth named Nahki, who had moved to Tokyo in 1980 to find more reggae, managed to achieve his dream of meeting Sugar. He recalled, "In 1984, when he had his very first tour in Japan, I had him, and his Black Roots Players Band come to my band's gig at Sambista, and unbelievably we could JAM! I had a couple of covers of Sugar's songs in my play list at that time, like So Much Trouble from his Wackies recording and Girl is Mine from his Sufferer's Choice" Album... It was a night of dreams comes true!"*

Sugar invited Nahki to come to Jamaica and hang out at Youth Promotion, which he did, returning every year until he settled in

Photo: George Phang relaxing at home with Mrs Phang

New York. "Sugar produced many songs with me and we created many combination tunes. He also showed me how to set up real Dance Hall (which actually enabled me to educate Japanese on how to set up real Jamaican Dance Hall Sound System), supported the dawning era of Japansplash and cultivate a Reggae market in Japan. Without Sugar's contribution Reggae wouldn't be as big as it is now".*

Youth Promotion

"As Sugar come home back, that was like 82", Jah Mikey recalls. "It's like Zodiac Sound a run the town, Virgo and them big sound. And him say, 'Jah know, we need a sound for the youth'. And me say, 'Yes, Sugar, the right thing that'. So now, the whole thing start."

Daddy Ants was down at the wharf where he was working, unloading the cargo from the ships, when Sugar came to see him. "That time I used to deejay at night, but in the day I was working on the waterfront. So, Sugar come to me now and say, 'Ants, you have to stop working'. And me say, 'Whaaaa?' And he said, 'Yea, you're gonna have to stop work, cause I need help'. I say, 'A whe' you up to now?' And him say him a go build a sound fe we and call the sound Youthman Promotion. I said, 'Alright! Me coming'.

Because of the rift with Jimmy, Sugar had separated himself from his involvement with the Black Roots sound. So, he began building his

*J-Pop World, Nahki Interview, http://www.j-popworld.com/Interviews/Nahki.php

Art by Jackie Knockshot

boxes out at the Sound of Silence headquarters. Blacka T was there helping out, as were Ants and many of the crew. Ants, although he knew better than to quit a paying job, still stuck close to the new sound. "When I leave work about 5 o'clock in the evening, I go straight to [Sound of] Silence place and we start build the boxes. So, every day we build a box. The guy that build the box his name is Rabba Dread. He build sound boxes. We get all the ply boards and turn it over to him and he cut them out, build all the boxes." Ants was able to make his small contribution, however. "The first screw that go in the boxes, is me put in that screw- the first box we build".

After the sound was constructed, the rest was easy. Entertainers were eager to work next to a popular and well respected entertainer. "Through Sugar is a big star," Ants recalled, "more star come in. So, the organization start to build up now, and just take off." Sugar was finally realizing his dream to have his own sound dedicated to young artists, Youth Promotion sound.

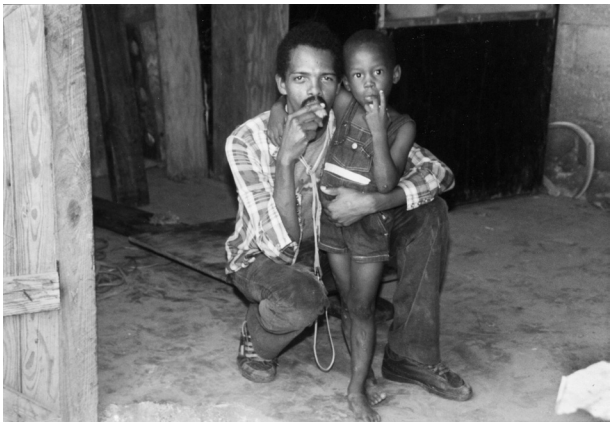


Photo: Jah Mikey with a young Minott

Jah Wise

When Sugar first brought out the sound, it was Stitch's old co-worker Jah Wise, who was handling the selecting. At the time Wise was selecting for Kilimanjaro part time, and doing some work with Jammy's, a bit of selecting and some managerial tasks.

But when Sugar needed help, Jah Wise, known for the support and assistance he had provided to numerous sounds and artists over the years, came on board to "revolutionize the sound". First he set down his conditions. "I said, for a year I don't want no [big name] deejay. [Sugar] was gonna get some big deejays- Josie Wales, all them kind. I said no, let me start out small. Me don't wan' go to no sound whe' have big deejays. That's why me go a Promotion, start it from scratch."

One of the most experienced men in the business, Jah Wise handled the legendary sound Tippertone, in Big Youth's day, and even selected

a couple of times for Big Youth's own sound, Negusa Negast, later on.

His neighborhood, in downtown Kingston, was right in the heart of the musical explosion of the 60's and 70's. "Where I come from, Coxsone was right around the corner. Prince Buster- right there. Beverly's [Records] right there. King Edwards right there. Joe Gibbs- Joe Gibbs come from country. He was trying to sing and couldn't make it and he start produce. Just one little space - everybody was there."

The youth grew up with his ear glued to the radio, listening to "Reddifusion", the cable-like signal that was piped directly into each subscriber's household. "They play jazz every morning, and country and western. This is where I get my musical inspiration." As a little boy, Jah Wise would try to slip into the dance unnoticed, but the rules were stricter then, so he would stand outside and listen. "They used to play blues, first– strictly blues [rhythm and blues] like Louis Jordon, Roscoe Gordon…" Jah Wise recalls.

His old yard, at 112 Princess Street (where Big Youth also lived), is still a hangout for the old guard. Many days Jah Stitch stops by to pick up a meal and sit down and talk. "My yard was like a university. Everybody was there," Jah Wise recalls. That yard can be seen in the movie Rockers. That's where Jah Wise is painting a Lion of Judah on the side of Horsemouth Wallace's motorcycle. Jah Wise was also a renowned visual artist who decorated many studios. He did all Lee Perry's artwork and painted

for Bob Marley, Jack Ruby and many others. Jack had a standing offer to Jah Wise of safe haven from his violence plagued downtown neighborhood. The selector, like several other dance hall artists, was always welcome to stay a spell out in the country when things got too hot at home

In 1984, Jah Wise agreed to stay with Youth Promotion for one year to build the sound.

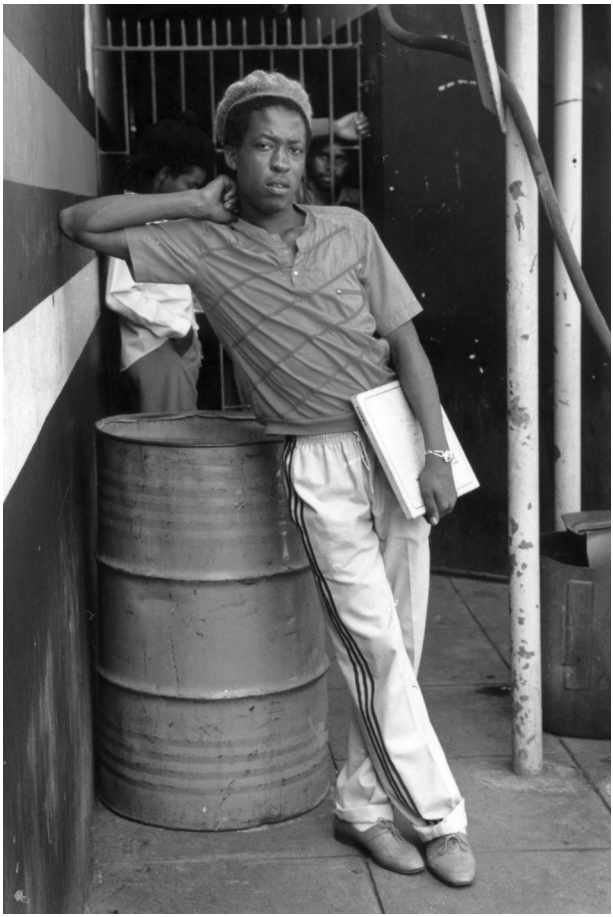


Photo: Thriller in Channel One

"It was doing well when I was there," Wise recalled. "I made it go all about - Portland, everywhere. It was just going good when me left it." After his time was up, Jah Wise, against the wishes of his wife, decided to leave the country and seek his fortune in New York. He chose, as his send off, the biggest dance Promotion had played yet. "Big, big dance in Negril- Fish Wirl. Yellowman, Charlie Chaplin, Half Pint, Tenorsaw, Junior Reid. Big dance! Millions of people come out to see Yellowman. [After the dance], I left from the Montego Bay [airport] to go to America."

Jah Wise flew out and settled in New York where he played the then current champion, Downbeat sound, and then built his own, US-based, Tippertone where he could play anything he wanted from his extensive, almost obsessive record collection.

During that first year in business, Sugar spent time recruiting young artists to complete his crew. Singer Thriller had just returned to Jamaica from his first trip to Toronto, Canada. Without any home set, he was freelancing around the city, spending a lot of time on Gemini, when he got the message. "Sugar just send for me. He send this guy to tell me he is starting a Youth Promotion thing, so he need all the youth come in and rally around him and build a youth thing together."

Sugar was just starting up the sound system, headquartered at his home, 1 Robert Crescent. His brother Ken recalls living at the Robert Crescent house peacefully at the time.

"We were there as family, and Sugar used to be at Maxfield Park doing his thing. And when [their mother] decide she's going to live in the country, she told him and then him move to Robert Crescent. He got the option to buy it and she told him to buy it, cause he wanted to start up his little studio and all of that". Sugar's mother left for Ewarton, and masses of youth started coming in, along with babymothers, brothers, sisters, brother in laws, kids and dogs.

Until the move, the sound had to play out on Rousseau Road where they held a regular Thursday night session. Once Sugar's mother left, music took over. The sound started playing in the massive yard, and the front bedroom was converted into a little home studio.

Youth Promotion, as a sound, had its official debut on Sugar's birthday, May 25, 1984, with Jah Wise selecting and Major, formerly Jah, Stitch operating. Don Angelo was singing.

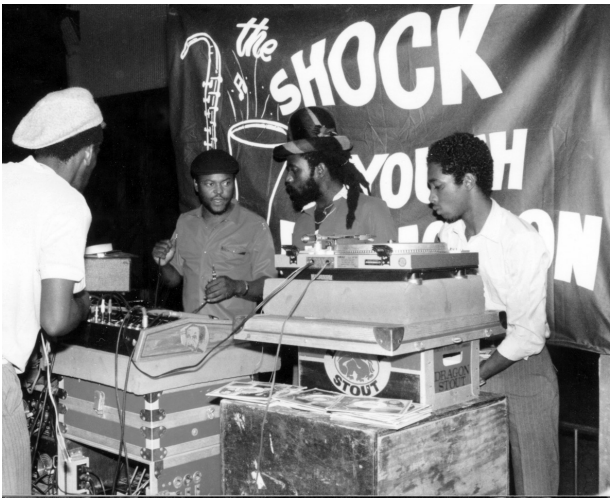


Photo: The Shock of the Century Four Sound Clash

Jah Mikey was deejaying. There was Blacka T, Trevor Junior and so many little youth who had been waiting for this day. Sugar had reached another of his goals, and just in time. For dancehall was about to bust big, officially, all over Jamaica and well beyond.

Dance Hall Rules

Throughout the first half of the decade, the dance hall movement was coming into its own. The term 'dance hall' began to heard, tentatively at first. But, by 1985, Jamaican music lovers proudly identified themselves as 'dance hall fans' and the sound system scene was healthier than ever.

Inner City Promotions top brass, Mike Thomlinson and Lois Grant, presented a new all- star concert series in 1984, a massive outdoor event like Sunsplash, but held in Kingston, at the Harbourview Drive In. They called the event Dance Hall and contracted artists who had made their names on the sound system circuit. The event was so popular, it had to be moved to Cinema II to accommodate the crowd of people. Reggae fans in Jamaica already knew they were listening to Dancehall. It was the press and the promoters that were finally getting the message.

Sugar released Dance Hall Showcase vol. II (Black Roots) with Informer, Genuine Lover, So We Love It, and Dread A Mi Idren, plus dubs, in the same 10" dubplate format. Dance Hall

By Jackie Knockshot

themes were showing up more frequently in his lyrics, and his style was moving toward the popular sing-jay which combined the deejay's rhythmic chanting with melodic vocals.

Buy Off the Bar, 1984, his first effort with new producer George Phang, was good example of his sing-jay style. In the lyrics, he chants, "Hear me now Supe*, Hear me now Star, you a come a dis ya dance, you make no war. You buy off the ba-ar!" This, the title song of the LP, became a jukebox hit and a dance hall staple as the aim of every entertainment establishment was to sell off the liquor. But the real killer track was the heartfelt Can't Cross the Border, with Sugar's emotional voice soaring over a keyboard and percussion flavored rhythm, with Sly and Robbie playing a well militant Death in the Arena version.

*Supe, as in Super

Herbman Hustling

When he wasn't at Robert Crescent, Sugar could often be found in Channel One. One day, Sugar heard Sly Dunbar experimenting with his computerized music machines and liked the odd, quirky sound of the rhythm he was making. "I heard Sly with this thing that was different from all kind of rhythm. It was like chu chu chu chi chuchuchuchu. You never heard a rhythm like that before." Sugar began to think that it might be the right match for the lyrics he had recorded in 1983 for Douglas Levy and Bullwackie in New York, as International Herb. With its languid pace, punctuated by frequent deep inhalations, the original was clearly never designed for the dancehall. "It was a slow beat. But, nobody heard it. It didn't get no air play or nothing."

So, Sugar offered to try his old lyrics over the new rhythm Sly was creating. "Sly Dunbar alone played it. Sly carried this drum machine thing that could actually program the bass. It was just like another version of Heavenless in a computerized form." Various singers were giving it a go. "There was, like, Al Campbell, Leroy Smart came through Channel One trying to sing on this rhythm. [But] nobody could sing on it the day. I knew that Herbman Hustling could work on this rhythm, man. I did the lyrics [for Wackie], but it was just wasting someplace. So, I just draw that." The second time around, it worked perfectly, making Sugar one of the first to have a popular release on a 'digital' rhythm.

The album of the same name that followed contained more hit dance hall material, like Dance Hall We Deh, and Dance Hall business, some of his romantic inspirations like Uptown Girl and So She Hot, and his classic roots ballads Give Jah the Key and All Gone. All together, it was a very strong album, produced with the help of Peter Chemist and released on Black Roots.

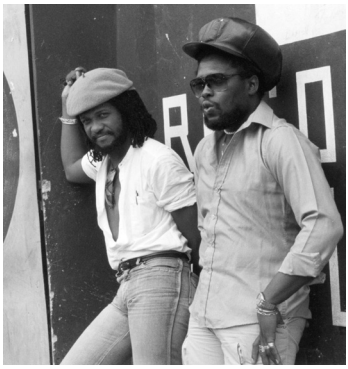


Photo: Sly and Robbie

Heartbeat Records, a division of Rounder Records in the US, had just been created in 1981 to carry reggae. They were one of the first to climb on the dance hall bandwagon with their 1982 release of a live session on vinyl. In 1984, they took enough of Sugar's material to make a full LP and released it as Slice of the Cake, giving it an unfortunate cover photo of a gaudy, record- shaped, cake. But the music inside was pure hits. The LP contained songs that Sugar had recorded with various producers, but retained the right to release for himself.

Roots and culture dominate the LP, with songs like Poor Man Pickney, Slice of the Cake, No Vacancy, Give Thanks and Praise, We a Fi Live, and the superb, Harbour Shark. There are also love songs, such as Is it True, which is one of his classics, and How Could I Let You Get Away. But Sugar had added a third theme- dance hall style material- with Nice it Up, "Come we come fe nice it up, come a this ya dance on a sat'day night…", Level Vibes, a love song about a girl 'niceing' up the dance- "Must be the riddim make she acting like that…", Ina Dance Hall Style- where he chants, "If you love thia ya riddim say, 'Forward'", and , of course, the quintessential dance hall lyric, Buy Off the Bar.

The same year, Lloyd Bullwackie Barnes produced the LP, Wicked a Go Feel It, again, a mix of roots and romance, recorded in New York with local, expatriate musicians. No dance hall here. But, Sugar's 45 releases at the time showed him moving strongly in a dance hall direction, with Dance Hall We Deh for Tad's in New York, Rub a Dub for Sly and Robbie, and Rydim for Powerhouse. People wanted dance hall, and Sugar was going to give it to them, singing, producing and, above all, through Youth Promotion.

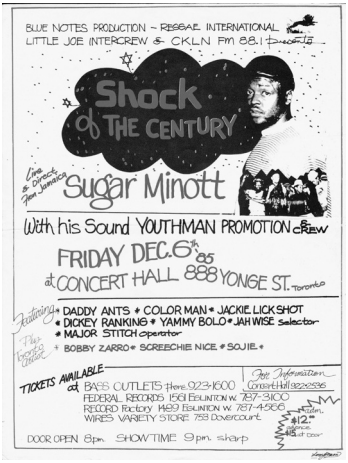
Toronto Tour

Christmas time, 1984. Sugar lead the ragamuffin crew to Toronto, Canada, for several nights of wild performing and wilder partying. Deejays Dona P, Blacka T, Daddy Ants, Dickie Ranking, and Colourman, with singers Chris Wayne and Trevor Junior, along with a crew consisting of Pleasure, to string up the sound, and Stitch to play it. Major Stitch arrived complete with his trunk full of dubplates. It was most of the crew's first trip abroad and it took some adjusting. Blacka T kept himself occupied doing summersaults down the hotel corridor, while the others stayed glued to the TV, watching soccer on the Italian station. Colourman would disappear periodically to "tune up" his voice. Sugar would get into a silly mood and parade around the room, wearing Stitch's tall, felt hat. Stitch was getting furious because everyone was rummaging in his bag and running off his treasured dance cassettes for friends and

Photo: Dickie Ranking on stage in Toronto

strangers alike. He complained constantly that Toronto was boring. "No badman business", he grumbled.* Pleasure finally lost his temper at a conscious dread who kept intoning, "Badness no pay." "But it CAN pay!" he insisted impatiently. But by show time, each man would emerge wrapped in a new winter jacket and scarf, with a girl on his arm, and his bag of ganja safely stored in his pocket.

"It was a joke to us", Daddy Ants recalls. "Cause it was the first we experience those things." Like the mischievous children they had just (barely) grown out of being, they took every opportunity to turn things upside down. Predictably, the morning after the first night, the crew was escorted out of the hotel by large, determined looking men in navy blue sweater vests. The boys found another lodging, slightly lower down the scale, with some peeling wallpaper and a broken TV. But result was the same. The morning saw them sitting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*There certainly was badman business in Toronto, but perhaps not up to his finely tuned standards.

Photo: Stitch surrounded by selection

on the sidewalk waiting for the Promoter to rescue them. They finally ended up in a 3 bedroom cottage by the lakeshore along the highway leading out of town. Sugar remained unperturbed and managed to get them to each show, to the radio for publicity, and to the plane on time for their flight to Miami en route to Kingston.

Back in Jamaica 1985

The new year saw the crew in Robert Crescent, back to the same routine. Sometimes Sugar would model one of his new stage outfits. He always liked to be well dressed when performing, as he felt befitted a veteran artist, and he went to great lengths to make sure someone (usually a baby mother) picked him up a new red and black track suit, a grey leather tam, or some fashion item before each show when he toured. But, not being particularly materialistic, Sugar then left most often these

items with a friend or fan as the tour moved on to the next city. Better to travel light and be free.

At home, in his yard, modeling in a long red caftan and holding a walking stick, he would amble around the yard, reminding viewers, as if in apology, "You see, down here we are bored. Some days we have nothing to do."

But, that wasn't exactly true. At 1 Robert Crescent, there was always something going on, however surreal that something may be. Full of entertainers, loafters*, cooks, Sugar's relatives, ganja sellers, ganja smokers, kids doing homework, even a stray dog, Robert Crescent was never boring.

The majority of the core crew was living at Robert Crescent, and Sugar loved the company of his friends. Everywhere he went, he took a portion of Promotionites. "Sharkie was staying at Robert Crescent. We were all staying at Robert Crescent," Daddy Ants recalled. "But differently, we have a girlfriend [where] we go and sleep. Through there is the base, we have to be on the base. Sugar, at nighttime, him voice music. So, when he go in the studio, we all bleach then. When Sugar go ina the studio, nobody na go home. Him a tell you, him a go work in the studio tonight so nobody can't go home. So, we there with him."

It drove his brother Earl Crazy. "Me and my brother have this argument too many times – there's too much people coming and living in a business place. It's not a guest house. And, some times, people carry bad Karma. People do evil things and evil things follow people.

*people who loaf about and do nothing

Photo: Daddy Shark helps hang up the Youth Promotion wash

Sometime people come and sleep and they [ie you] don't know who is who. And this was a problem that me and him had."

Sugar had no problem with the mutating array of people surrounding him, even as he slept. After recording all night, the crew often arose late and drifted into headquarters after lunch time. Some days, legendary singer Junior Byles would wander through. Now, living in poverty and demonstrably suffering from some form of mental illness, Byles had become a nuisance rather than a hero to the crew. He would walk into the midst of a group of people, take a tattered wallet out of his pocket and turn it upside down. A lone nickel would clatter to the ground and Byles would hand the wallet around for donations. He often passed around a worn magazine cover featuring a young blond model and sadly explain that his 'Curley Locks'* looked just like her.

Singer Lloyd Hemmings, himself occasionally drifting between the real world and his own, would walk in wearing a long metal bar around

*From his hit Curley Locks, written about a girl he was in love with at the time

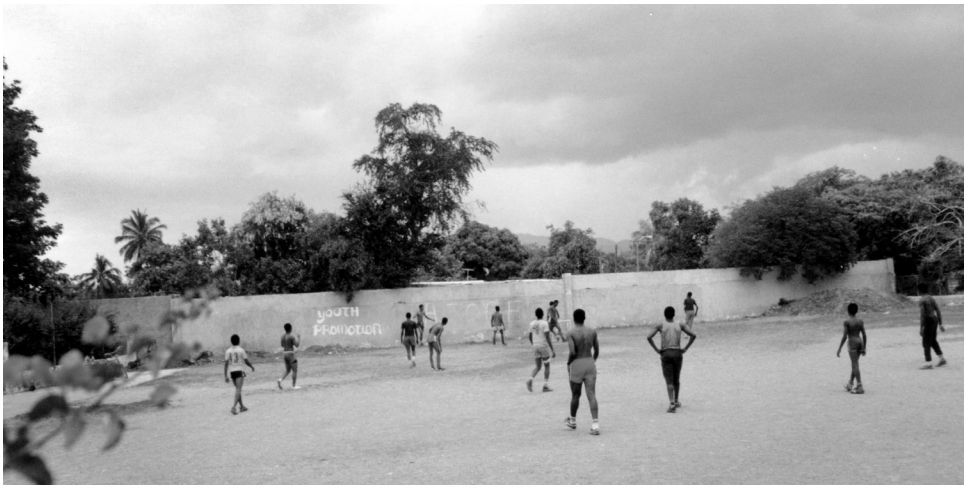
his neck with a large pin sticking out of his hair. He carried around an old broom handle he was carving with a razor blade. Sometimes he drew on the walls with charcoal - mountains, train tracks, a cassette tape with wheels chugging along, some charts to demonstrate musical notation with bars and chords. Other days he would climb a tree making monkey noises and swing from a branch upside down (He could also do sit ups in this position).

Daddy Ants could keep the idlers entertained with his history lessons. To a crowd of Youth Promotion personnel and passersby, he would proclaim the popular political fable that when Selassie came to Jamaica, he gave Prime Minister Manley a rod to rule and he gave opposition JLP Hugh Shearer a little puppy that turned into a lion. A youth in the audience speaks up. He remembers seeing Manley walk through Payneland with that rod. Blacka T would be writing lyrics with Colourman, like their composition, The World, "Who can wine,

Photo: Junior Byles loafting intensely in Channel One

a the one Palestine…", on loose sheets torn from a school exercise book. All the deejays in Jamaica used the inexpensive, ubiquitous notebooks to write their lyrics. A big field around the corner from the house served a playing field on soccer days when the whole crew would go out in shorts and play a rousing game.

The presence of so many young children, both in Sugar's family and in the crew, kept the vibes energetic and unpredictable. Little Kirk, Rohan and Yammie Bolo were still kids. But Tenorsaw and the regular crew were not much older. Yammie Bolo hung out with a couple of boys his age, Coolie and a youth named Wayne who was Bingi Jean's son Sometimes the kids' play would get too rough and a fight would erupt. Then the adults had to step in – like when Yammie got into a tussle with Wayne, and Bingy Jean and Teacher, Sugar's friend, got into a argument of their own trying to break up the kids.



Four Sound Clash

By mid-decade, dancehall was the only game in town. At 'Dance Hall '85', 20,000 people filled the Harborview Drive In Theater. At Reggae Sunsplash, Dance Hall Night had become the most popular evening of the annual event.

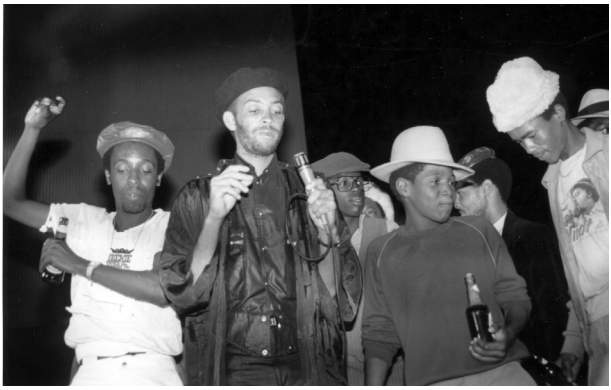


Photo: The crew on stage for the clash

Nineteen Eighty Five saw the first of a series of Four Sound Clashes put on by police officer and promoter Isaiah Laing. Laing was already well known to concert go-ers for his 1984 Sting concert, the first in his series of massive stage shows at Cinema II in New Kingston, featuring mainly dance hall artists. Based on the success of the Sting series, Laing went on to host the enormous 4 sound clash, The Shock of the Century. Laing was already legendary in the community for supporting and socializing with artists. In the early 80's, Laing was holding dances with Gemini and Volcano at Prison Oval in Spanishtown.

For better or for worse, police where an inevitable part of the dance hall scene. Another well known Police officer, Bigga Ford held a Christmas Morning show at the National Arena In 1987. The event got favorable reviews for security and artist treatment. He also donated part of the proceeds to a local children's home and invited all the children to the show.

In fact, police and soldiers were some of the biggest session promoters and fans. For one thing, they where efficient fund raisers. "Because they were part of the law," U Brown explains, "people were quick to invest with them, cause, at least, certain things is secure. They know how to get the contacts, to get the venue. They can get certain type of security to make sure that it runs right."

Laing occupied a charmed position between both worlds and could act as an intermediary between the forces of the law and the ghetto runnings. According to singer Anthony Malvo, "He was a 'street police' and he knew everybody. He was a 'rude boy' police, and through him love music, him start keep dance. But nobody can't mash up fe him dance. He was the best man to keep a party." In addition, he could get special exemptions from the noise laws and keep the show going until dawn with the handy rational that, because of the dicey areas the venues ere in, it was safer for the patrons to go home at daybreak, rather than in the middle of the night.

"These guys come into the business," Explains Dexter Campbell of Echo Vibration. "and if you have a problem, you can see Mr. Laing, or Mr. Laing will talk to the other officer and say, 'Alright, don't trouble such and such artist, man, him cool. When him smoke him weed, him act like him stupid, but him alright.' And try to get things level between the artist and the other officer. And if the artist is wrong, Mr. Laing will say to them, 'Listen, you can't behave like that. You have to learn to respect the law.'" Mr. Laing understood that being a law officer was an asset in dance promotion. According to the Gleaner, "The artists tend to come from some tough areas and he was able to speak with their friends and associates, accessing information about the very situations he needed to be on top of. 'Because of the trend I set in the force, bad man love me to this day. Bad man tell me most things they would not tell anyone else'." * Laing was often spotted in places where artists meet, such as 1 Robert Crescent and the Volcano Corner.

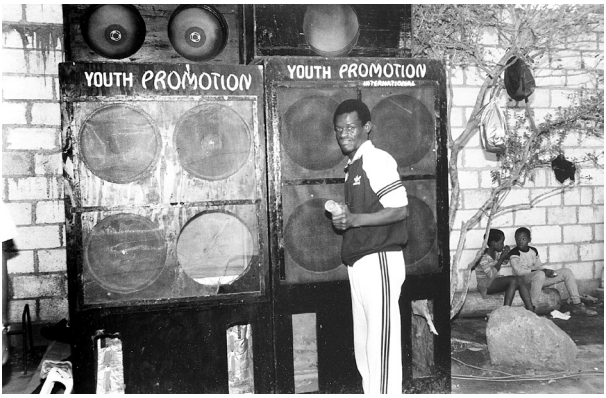


Photo: Jackie Knockshot

*Laing moves from crime to music beat, Mel Cooke, published: Sunday | November 30, 2003 Jamaican Gleaner

On the night of the Shock of the Century, Youth Promotion arrived on the scene with Yammie Bolo, Dickie Ranking, Colourman, Jackie Knockshot, Thriller and so many more that they looked like they would all tumble off the tiny stage. Jammy held his corner with Nitty Gritty, Chacka Demus and Tanto Irie. General Trees, in the Black Scorpio corner, put on a slick, professional stage show dressed in full grey leather, with his buddies in 'Horseman' outfits. The only female on any of the 4 stages was the small but powerful Lady G with Scorpio. Arrows, formerly a powerful sound from out east with the duo Shamba and Liberty, disappointed with only Peter Metro showing up.

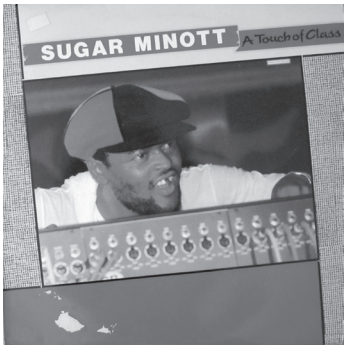
The success of the four sound clash proved to the world just how far this new 'dancehall' thing had come. With a turnout that filled the entire drive in theatre, the whole affair became a celebration of how accepted dancehall had come to be in Jamaica. Dance sessions were being held more frequently in uptown venues, and it was the dancehall artists, especially the deejays, who were being asked to tour and perform abroad. Coming away with the trophy, did wonders for Youth Promotion's reputation.

Sound clashes were a very serious business in Jamaica. The winner was guaranteed a large following. The losers often faded away from the shame of being beaten. They quickly lost their crowd, in the fickle world of dancehall, while the winner was bathed in glory, getting more bookings that one sound could fill. "From that four sound clash, the [Youth Promotion] sound

just kick off," Blacka T recalls. Although the choice of winner engendered a fierce controversy, the publicity gave Sugar's sound the exposure it needed, and the set began 'shocking out' all over the island.

For a short time, lasting through 86, Youth Promotion held the spotlight. Although Sugar never had the resources to put into the sound, like the businessmen who just owned their hobby sounds on the side, Youth Promotion was keeping up with, and even pushing ahead, of the pack.

Photo: George Phang with Echo Minott



Recording

In 1985, perhaps his most prolific year, Sugar was in the middle of a great run with George Phang who produced a total of four and a half albums with him, Buy off the Bar in 1984, and the rest in 1985: A True, Rydim, Time Longer than Rope and Rockers Awards Winner with Leroy Smart and the other side. Of the three solo albums, Rydim is the strongest, containing dance hall cuts like the title track, as well as cultural material like Nah Go a South Africa. But all of them contain Sugar's mix of dance hall, romance and roots, with the solid, reliable backing of Sly and Robbie.

Sugar also enjoyed a massive deployment of 45's from all over the map, and from many different producers, perhaps as many as 40. To mention the more notable, for King Jammy, he had A Touch of Class and Jammin in the Street (his Sleng Teng version). And for local Jammy competitor, King Tubby, he had Hard Time Rock, another lament about the bitter reality of ghetto living. Same for the Black Scorpio production, Victim of Society. His series of releases for Bunny Lee saw the veteran producer wading into digital territory. The pick of the Bunny Lee work included This is Rockers Music, Leader of the Pack, Here Comes the Hurt Again, I Know Them Love it, Play On, The Dance Hall King and the two strongest, Badder Than the Riddim and Them Have fe Come a Me. In the 12" 45, Four Wheel Wheelie with deejay, Charlie Chaplin (Crown), Sugar continued a trend started by

Early B with his hit, One Wheel Wheelie. And the 7" 45, War and Crime on Youth Promotion, was Sugar's answer to Jammy's Sleng Teng rhythm and featured Jackie Knockshot's newsreel impressions.

More than one woman

As he states in his early hit, Lover's Race*, Sugar had "more than one woman" in his life, and lived with all the complications such an arrangement can bring. A born romantic, the only thing Sugar loved as much as music was being in love, and he frequently was in love. An unlikely choice for romantic hero, Sugar could hardly have been called 'handsome' in the traditional sense. He was not very tall, getting a little pudgy at the waist, and missing a front tooth. Yet, he managed to attract women with his melodic voice, his sentimental lyrics and his personal warmth.

*More than one woman in my life
All of them a fight to be my wife
But if they would take their respective place
This ya never woulda be a lover's race

Sugar's first sweetheart was Elsie Cassell, starting back in the school days before Sugar had an international reputation. "My parents went to the same Elementary School, Prep School (Ramsey Prep School) and later met up again when they were 14yrs old at my mom's school fair (John Mills School)", Daughter Tamar recalls. "Dad attended Kingston College at the time. He always told me that mom was his first love and that she was the only girl he has ever made

"More than one woman in my life

All of them a fight to be my wife

But if they would take their respective place

This ya never woulda be a lover's race"

a move on. All the others made a move on him, because he was Sugar Minott, the singer. But she knew him before he had anything."

It wasn't easy at first for the young couple. Elsie was living with her mom on Chisholm Avenue, right nearby Sugar. But Elsie's folks didn't approve of the relationship between the two sweethearts. "They felt they were better than my brother and better than my family," Earl explained. "None of them liked Sugar,

Photo: Elsie in the Robert Crescent Studio

the mom or the dad. So, she was with her parents, but after a while, her parents run her out of the house. And then she have to find a place to stay. So, one of the time, she was staying with my mom [at Robert Crescent]."

When they first lived together, the couple was so poor, they had to cook out of an old cheese pan, and hide under the bed when the landlord came to the door. Elsie had to keep washing his two pair of shorts because that's all he had to wear.

When Elsie was 19, she had the first of her four children with Sugar, Alton Ellis Minott, followed by Tamar, Debra and Andrew Paul. The only problem was that Sugar had another baby mother, Mitsy, who had his sons, Booga and Daniel. And they all ended up living under one roof, where, eventually, they were joined by Maxine Stowe, who he later officially married (and even later by Marcia). Blacka T explains, "Robert Crescent had about 7 bedrooms and enough space. Elsie was in one, Mitsy was in one and Maxine was in one. Always a surprise with Sugar Minott. He's still got young babies."

Photo: Mitsy loved to sew

Sugar, with his big heart, simply couldn't turn anyone away. When they came to him- babymothers, friends or artists- and needed a home, he offered his- to everyone who could fit. All they had to do was ask, and Sugar would open his doors. Inevitably, as soon as one babymother moved in, another babymother would come, see the first one there, and come herself. Sugar explained. "So, one [babymother] came down and said, 'Look, me nah have nowhere to live. Me a stay so, too.' Now, I can't stop them cause they got kids, right? So, there comes a next one. 'Oh- them over here? A me a come too.' I couldn't run them out of the house." As Daddy Ants reports, "That is a drama! Sometimes the two of them there [and] all more babymother come in too. Normally, when he go a foreign, he still have more woman a foreign. But, he have all of them under manners."
In 1985, it was still only Mitsy and Elsie. Tamar, Elsie's daughter and later to be known as Fire Pashion, remembers, "At one point, I had my mom and my step mom, Mitsy, living under the same roof which didn't matter to me because I got to play and have fun with my brothers every day. It's because of that unity and love that we shared in that yard as kids, why we are so close today. I wouldn't trade growing up at Robert Crescent for nothing!"

Where Elsie was quiet and full of smiles, Mitsy was fiery and intense. In 1986, Elsie, was in bed most of the time. She had a difficult pregnancy but gave birth to a baby boy. The newborn was named Andrew Paul. Alton, Tamar and Debbie were running free in the yard, the two girls

always looking tidy with their hair combed and a bow on top. Tamar loved that life. "I'm the second child, first girl for both parents. Growing up at Robert Crescent was like an adventure for me. I never saw it as noise or commotion…I was the daughter of Sugar Minott, which allowed me to meet new and talented people every day, I learnt a lot from growing up in that yard and environment. I learnt how to be strong, how to love, how to share, how to communicate, and, most of all, how to be a great entertainer. I had so much great entertainers around, with my dad being the teacher –Awesome!"

Elsie and Sugar remained together for 25 years but parted ways, eventually, because of all that drama and because of the growing numbers of resident baby mothers.

In the morning, Mitsy would be up and around and doing the chores. She was in charge of practical tasks while Sugar was away, like getting each entertainer his passport and airline ticket when a concert abroad was coming up. Her two boys, Daniel and Booga, would be in the yard practicing some karate moves, or getting on their uniforms to go to school.

But there was another woman in Sugar life, Maxine Stowe, who frequently accompanied Sugar on tours, often carrying two track tapes of his work around in her purse to keep them safe. Then still living in New York, and accustomed to business dealings outside of Jamaica, Maxine was very efficient and tirelessly organized, just what the impulsive and unsystematic singer

Photo: Buddy Bye with little Minotts

needed. For Sugar was often disorganized and easily bored. When being driven across town to a venue, he would moan, "How many million more miles is it?" Having a strong, capable woman was essential to keeping the business end on track, while Sugar took care of the creative side.

Brother Earl, managing Sugar's affairs in UK, was having trouble with the random business practices at Youth Promotion. Sometimes, he would request a song to release in the UK, or copies of the new records to sell, but it

would take three months for the tapes, or shipment to arrive. Earl, very much the opposite, found that the casual business approach of Youth Promotion irked him. "My brother was bright, but he wasn't in control of his business like a businessman supposed to do. These were one of the problems I had with my brother. He wasn't businessman like. Sometimes he would send for money from Jetstar. [Then] Maxine would come and do her thing - go to [Jetstar boss, Mr.] Palmer and get [the royalties]. It was just confusion. You don't know what is what, cause he collect money here so… It was just crazy. To me it wasn't a business. But to him, since he's a ghetto person and he's from poor people, he doesn't see it that way. The money he makes, my brother could be living in style. But he put it all back into the ghetto, don't it?" Sugar could drive people crazy, with his stubborn streak and set ways of doing things. But that didn't stop people from just adoring him, because, in the end, his heart was in the right place, and what he was doing, he was doing for the sake of others.

L&M Records

1986 was a good year for Youth Promotion. The Christmas before, Sugar held a stage show in front of 500 people with bun and cheese and curry goat for all – a Christmas treat for the children in Maxfield Park.

Around the sound, the 'maga' deejay named Skinny Ranks was back in action. To make his

entrance in a dance, he would wait until the night was advanced and then walk straight in, clearing a path ahead of him, as he slowly approached the mike. Once there, he went through his lyrics with his new 'squeak' style and did a few jello-legged dance steps. Then he would carefully turn the mike over to the next in line, and disappear, slowly, into the cheering crowd. A Junglist deejay named Blink I was around the set on the strength of his computerized hit, Lovin Stylee.

Everyone was keeping busy, preparing for the upcoming tour of the UK. Some hurt feelings were inevitable for those not selected to go along. Especially when the crew returned and began asking where to buy black shoe polish to 'touch up' their new Clarks. Sugar couldn't go with them as he had some shows in America to do. So, Thriller, Stitch, Colourman, Daddy Freddie, and Yammie Bolo went without their leader. Colourman remembers the tour chiefly for the disorder. "When we toured England, it was like a lot of chaos. It seem like there was a lot of money grabber." But, it was still a big success,

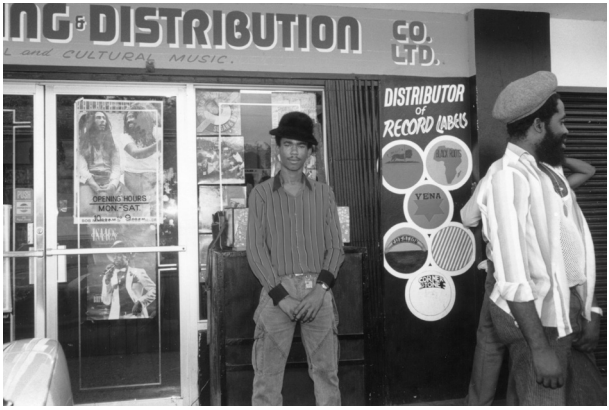


Photo: Dona P in front of the record store

musically. "All those shows was sold out," Thriller recalls. "[But] after our tour finish, we still there." Left in the UK beyond their tour commitments, they had no idea what to do, so Thriller stepped in and booked some dates for the sound. "I say, OK, we can't just stay here and not doing nothing. So, I say, for the rest of the time we are here, gonna just do something, so that's where I start promoting." A job he still does.

Before the tour, Sugar, generously, told the crew he would understand if they decided to remain abroad. All he wanted was to make sure the dubplates came home with them to play on the sound. The crew was free to choose. Almost everyone choose to come home, or, at least they did that year. Freddy hung back a bit, but by the end of the year, he was home again and began seriously shocking out on the sound with some anti-government lyrics.

Sugar had recently moved Youth Promotion Headquarters to a store front where he began the process of constructing a studio. The new studio and record store were housed in a nice

Photo: Skinny Ranks

*meaning a citizen of renown who supported his people, not literally a military soldier

size building right across from Winner's Place on Waltham Park Road, conveniently located right next to the stop where the number 15 bus from Crossroads let off. Sugar rented both the upstairs and downstairs and was just waiting on the beauty parlor and bar to move out so he could start installing his equipment. There was a tiny, phone booth sized voicing room on the first floor. Mitsy went to live there with her children in the rooms at the back of the shop. Sugar was planning to charge less for studio time and dub cutting than the going price so that "poorer people in the sound business can get an ease in expenditure", according to Jackie Knockshot.

L&M Records (for Lincoln Minott) served as a distribution outlet for Skeng Don whose operation was in Miami and needed a place in Jamaica to handle his releases. The outside walls were decorated with large reproductions of the Youth Promotion label alternating with the Skeng Don label, the one with the horseshoe and the Mercedes-Benz symbol.

Kenneth Black, aka Skeng Man, had been around for a long time as a well known businessman, dance promoter and an avid supporter of the PNP. "Originally, before a lot of people know him in the outside world, he was in the construction business," U Brown recalls. "His company, Black Brothers construction, did well when Seaga fell from power and the government returned to PNP control."

Skeng was adored by his community. "He's a guy that grow up in the dance hall business

Photo: Nicodemus and Jah Mikey on Stur Mars

Photo: Sugar and Tenorsaw in the yard

from a long time," Joe Lickshot explained. "Skeng was a soldier* in the area back then. From a long time, he used to keep dance and make the people happy. He love rub-a-dub sounds".

Skeng loved rub-a-dub sounds so much, he created his own, a new set that he constructed as a modern version of the 70's killer sound, Papa Roots. To that end, he borrowed Jah Mikey from Youth Promotion, and enlisted Nicodemus and U Brown, two of the biggest deejays in the Papa Roots days. He added reliable Papa Roots selector Danny Dread, and set out on the road, adding major talent along the way, like Super Cat and Cutty Ranks.

A video that currently circulates through the internet shows Stur-Mars sound backing a huge PNP rally, run by Jingles, in Skateland in 1986. The dance/rally followed a day of demonstration that took place that afternoon around Halfway Tree, blocking all the stores. Aquarius Studio pulled down the gate in front and anyone inside at the time, was stuck there for the duration, watching through the metal bars, as throngs of people milled around the square, ordinary citizens and the occasional band of tough boys, marked by their women's colonial style felt hats and pearl necklaces. The demonstration went on all afternoon and then moved inside

*meaning a citizen of renown who supported his people, not literally a military soldier

the Skateland arena for the rally and dance. Skateland's owner, Jingles, like Skeng, was a one-party man. A poster on the wall inside the bar read, "Jingles say Stand Firm with Stur-Mars" and photo of Manley, framed in wood, was hung proudly on the wall.

Apart from his music work, Skeng was known widely for his largess. "He take care of people in the area. He's been doing that for 10, 20. 30 years. He'd be taking care of people form back in the days. Nothing never change. So, in the 80's he was taking care of people the same way," recalls Selector Aisnley Grey, who worked with the sound in the mid 80's. Skeng was well known for supporting of people in his community. Everyone who worked with him came away with a gift- a car, a white suit, a bicycle. Skeng was there whenever anyone needed something. And everybody knew his name.

Skeng had gone to Miami and built up a recording studio and label. Then, he returned to Jamaica to build Stur-Mars, which he then took on the road to conquer Kingston. One move in the strategy was to challenge Youth Promotion to a battle. Once the challenge was accepted, Stur- Mars began a campaign to recruit Youth Promotion's top talent.

Skeng and Sugar weren't close in the beginning. "I used to know him from before, from when he wasn't Skeng Don," Sugar began the tale of how the great rivals became friends. "When Skeng come back from foreign now, he get his big sound. But Youth Promotion [was] ruling.

Photo: Inside the record shop

Everybody trying to get out Youth Promotion [i.e. beat them in a clash]. So, the first thing they did, they took away Yammie Bolo and Tenorsaw. Because they had big money, they kinda bribe the kids. So, Tenorsaw said, 'We not gonna sing on Youth Promotion', although he's not gonna sing against us, still. He's just gonna not sing. Remember these are kids that we are growing up, feed them, clothes them.

Photo: Pleasure and Major Stitch look on in disgust as Yammie Bolo eats a tub of Ice Cream solo

"And then Yammie Bolo, he went to sing on their sound, all of sudden. Cause Skeng Don buy him shoes - nuff pretty things that we couldn't buy at the time. So, he went to sing for them. Those were two of our best people. So I had to go look some substitute people to fit in. So, we went and we find this youth called Little Kirk. He was a small boy like Yammie Bolo, and we need another small boy to put in there to make it match up. So, we carried Tony Rebel, Little Kirk. We had Colourman, Dickie Ranking, myself, Dona P, Blacka T, Daddy Ants - that was it. And we went to Skateland.

"Boy! Let me tell you! He had the biggest sound. Our sound was like a transistor [radio] to their sound. But we had the vibes, man, we had the vibes. And what happened was that Yammie Bolo, who was singing on their sound- he forgot that he was not on our sound! Because he sing on our sound so much, he forgot, and what he was singing on Stur-Mars, he just came out and said, 'Youth Promotion the number one sound', and the whole dance just mash up. Because he sing it every day, so often, he couldn't automatically change. The people tell Stur-Mars to lock off, man!

"And they did it again. They tried the same thing again and they got flopped twice. So, after that, instead of he trying to rival with me, he was keeping a big show in Miami and he wanted me to go on the show, so we just become good friends. That's how we became more closer. You know, like two boxer done fight, them say, 'Bwoy, you too rough for me. Bwoy, come work for me'.

"So, I went to do the music for Skeng Don. I went to do the production, 'cause he was building a big studio. And we did a Little John album. All of those that came out of SKD, that was my work- me and Jackie Mittoo."

Now that Sugar and Skeng were close, Skeng was frequently flying Sugar and several of his protégés to Miami for recording sessions and for shows. The Miami studio was also a great location to cut dubplates for a clash, far away from prying eyes and ears.

So, Skeng began working with Youth Promotion artists. He released, among other records, Sugar's Wrong Move and Who Kill the Boops, Tenorsaw's Kiss an Angel, Wake the Town, Bad Boy, and Dance Hall Feeling, Yammie Bolo's Free Mandela and Little John's LP, Youth of Today.

The shop on Waltham Parke road lasted several years. But then Skeng's musical empire fell and he retired to the country. Alone, Youth Promotion couldn't afford the upkeep. "We had that running for a good while," Ants recalls. "We had the studio out there and the record shop at the front. Then, after that, we leave and we carry everything back to Robert Crescent. The landlord was pressuring [Sugar]. Though him name Sugar Minott, the landlord charge him excess amount of money and him [the landlord] not fixing up the place and everything. So, we leave.

Ganja

Most of the time, life at Robert Crescent unfolded in a predictable way. First thing in the morning (which was whenever Sugar woke up after a night of bleaching on the road or singing at a dance), Sugar would bring out the telephone chalice and disappear in a fog. Then everyone got a turn, even little Yammie Bolo, who was around 14 or 15 years old. This also used to make sensible brother, Earl, crazy. "Cause everyday he get up, he lick this chalice, he smoke this chalice, he lick this chalice, he lick this chalice, he smoke this chalice- everyday! And nobody sit down and tell him, 'No, Sugar, you do too much. Now, take it easy now'. They were all just yes, yes, yes. He need somebody who is strong like him. Cause he is very strong minded. He always want his own way. And if you don't stand up to him. More times me and him ketch up- not one or two times, you now." But to Sugar, ganja was an essential part of living in

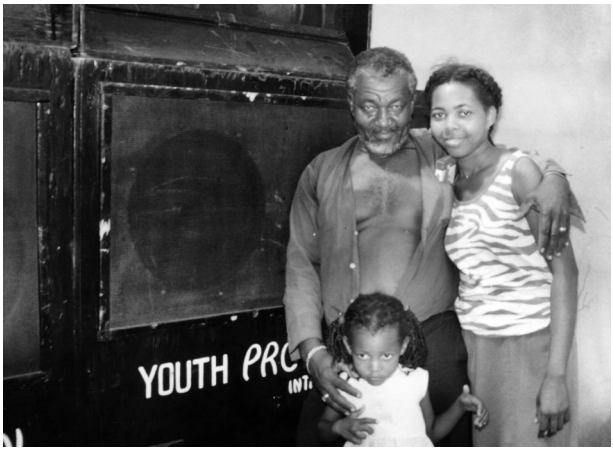


Photo: Lloydie with his wife, Patsy,

Photo: Daddy Ants and Shark pass the chalice

the ghetto, a ritual and a means of survival. He sang about the men who sold a little Sensi to get by, and he actively supported them all.

Almost every day, local ganja men made their trips out to the country and returned to Robert Crescent with a sack of Sensimillia. Sugar would cut up the new batch of weed and divide it among crew and staff. Smoking was a way of life in the Youth Promotion yard. No one went without herb at 1 Robert Crescent. Herb kept the vibes flowing.

Sugar's Brother in law, Lloydie, used to keep a bag of carefully wrapped draws that sold for a dollar each, or thereabouts, depending on the quality. Most days, Lloydie would sweep out the yard, waiting for customers. In his spare time, he attended PNP political meetings and had dreams of running for office. In 1986, he was following the huge 48th General Conference that attracted delegates from all over the world. He reported back that the conference had pulled in $600,000

for the party and the JLP were complaining, saying that it was all ganja money that was flowing into the opposition's party's coffers.

During 1986, Sugar spent a lot of time abroad, touring with and without the sound. When Sugar was around the yard, everything stayed cool. But when he went away, the police took advantage and came around asking for money, maybe $100, maybe $200. Not very subtle in their technique, they would march right into the yard and announce, "I'm hot. I need a drink" or "I need some lunch money. I'm hungry". If they weren't satisfied, they would take a couple of men and hold them for herb. They took Bingi Jean and once Colorman, but Lloydie got the brunt of it, getting hauled down to the station regularly and, generally, released soon afterward.

With Sugar jetting about Europe and on his way to Japan, the police were getting restless. They were inviting themselves over so often that Lloyd finally got the idea of locking the front gate to gain, at least, a little lead time to stash the chalice and the bag of little herb draws. Selling a bit on the side was one of the few options for making enough money to feed your kids. The police knew, everybody in the neighborhood knew, but all kept silent, at least for a price. The police had children to feed too.

Police also showed up routinely to break up dances. They broke up a Youth Promotion dance on June 11 at 1 am saying there had been a robbery around the corner and the thieves had

run into the yard. It was all part of life in the ghetto, exactly as Sugar had expressed it in so many songs.

The Youth Promotion Crew

The sound personnel at the consisted of Buddie Bye, the box man, who had to bleach with the sound after a dance, Froggy (Rocky Welsh) and Bigga, another box man. Knobby (L. Wiggin), who had been in charge of record promotion, distribution and making the stampers, had been killed in a car accident on October 1984. His job had been to drive around all day in the car with a trunk full of 45s and two tracks. Unfortunately, a drunk driver was racing his car and the two collided. Not unusual for Jamaica.

Bingi Jean, who was supposed to be Sugar's body guard, spent most of his time sitting in yard and reading from the bible to the crew. He also brought in the good herb. Jean, an educated and organized man who had lived four years in Canada, understood the sound business well. He explained to the crew the economics of Youth Promotion, and why each man wasn't getting rich off performing with the sound. He would tell them, "The sound rents for $2,000 a night. If it costs $100 to move the sound and another $500 for miscellaneous related expenses, $1,400 can't divide between 30 men." He would explain patiently. But it was hard for the crew. The little money the sound earned had to be both shared among all, and, at the same time, reinvested in the business.

Donnie "Minott", one of the chefs at the time, along with Jah Goody, was building a stand to sell food. He wasn't a blood relative, but got the name almost as an honorary title after doing so much for the organization. Donnie was always smiling ear to ear, happy and friendly. In the day, he would cook and keep the yard clean. He also had a shack at the corner for a while in 1985, where he would sell food and patch tires, but the police came and made him tear it down. When the sound played, he would station himself at the entrance outside the dance selling roast corn. In the afternoon, at home base, Donnie would put a big pot on the fire and cook up Ital Stew for the crew. Blacka T, wanting to help, would thrust his arms into the vat of flour and water until he was plastered up to his neck and most of the flour was around him on the ground, chanting gleefully, "I want to mix the flour! The Flour!"

Keeping it in the family, younger brother Ken Minott (Kennedy Jones) was doing the mixing in the studio. Talouse (not a relation) did the mixing on the sound and Pleasure, another Minott brother, strung up the sound. Pleasure Minott (Rudolph Simms), had been living in Waterhouse. But when Sugar began to make a name for himself, Pleasure got curious and headed down to Maxfield Park and introduced himself to Sugar's crew. As nobody there had ever laid eyes on him before, when he came to the yard proclaiming himself to be Sugar's brother, the crew ran him out of the yard. Daddy Ants recalls, "We see Pleasure come up and say he is his brother and we start run him away.

Photo: Nobby and Bingi Gene load up the car with 45s

Photo: Chris Wayne, Bingi Gene and Tamar

Photo: Pleasure with Major Stitch as Stitch contemplates a rose

[We] say, 'Move from yah so! Talk bout Sugar a you breddah!' We used to run him away, cause we never know nobody! Sugar have to come tell we, yes, is him brother." Pleasure ended up becoming an integral part of the team, stringing up the sound and keeping the amps and boxes in working order. Another brother, Earl, was in the UK, managing Black Roots and Sugar's business, abroad, including an UK version of the Youth Promotion sound which played every Sunday in Melon Road. Earl was the selector.

Major Stitch

Major, formerly Jah, Stitch didn't hang out with Youth Promotion in Sugar's yard like the kids. Already an elder in the dance hall scene, he had his own circles, his more elite dreadlocked crowd and his Spangler friends. Stitch was one of the original Spanglers, known for their dress style as much as for their toughness "Them say I never mismatch yet. I always match," he commented proudly.

Stitch was an old time Spangler and still dressed the part. "Yes, I always was [a Spangler]. They were the mogelers [i.e. modelers] in Jamaica, wearing the English clothes like the Terlene [i.e.terylene] and wool and all those. And the 'heavy duties'- Spangler specialize in all them things. And the Clarks- everything from England, Spanglers used to love that. All those things. Spanglers make them popular in Jamaica."

As one of the first time, original Spanglers, Stitch was there when they got the name. "Spangler come from a show. That was a movie, a gangster movie with this gang and so we would go and watch this show and we were fascinated by it and just call ourselves Spangler."

Spanglers wore the clothes that came to be associated with the well turned out Jamaica male- pin stripe suits, Arrow shirts, "diamond" socks, and the ankle high Clarks. The term "diamond" referred to the argyle pattern – large, solid colored diamonds alternating with an outline of a diamond shape in a contrasting color. The argyle sock, originating in Scotland, became popular in 1949 when the president of Brooks Brothers, John Clark Wood, brought them to the United States to introduce a new 'casual look'. In Jamaica, the diamond pattern was anything but casual. The pattern was an instantly recognizable, high status item.

Photo: Little Rohan with Stitch

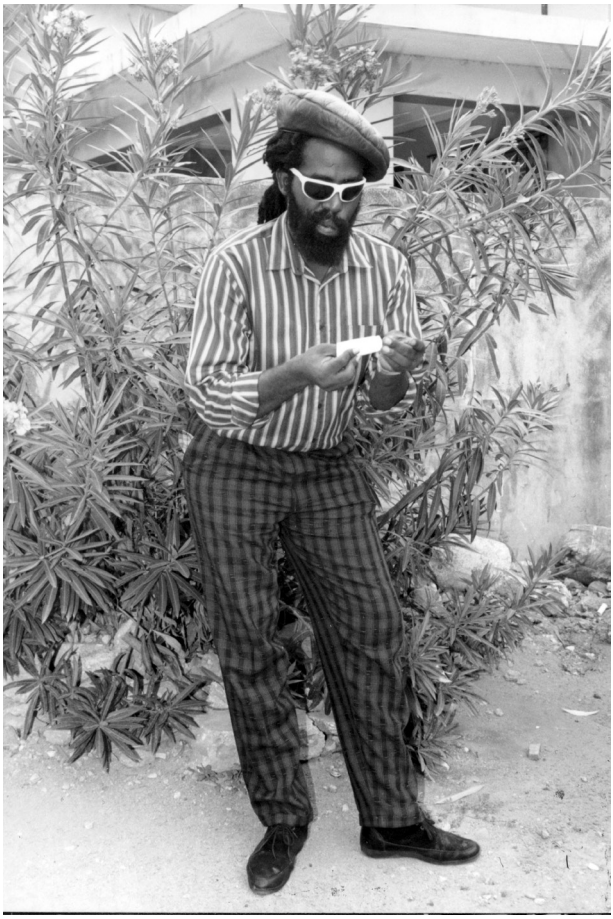


Photo: Major Stitch rolling a spliff

Image is important in Jamaica and fashion was used as a means of communication. Your style defined your status, your ranking in the community. Some styles stated that you deserved respect. Other styles said "Keep away!" very clearly. Like when tough guys started using glittery nail polish. In the beginning, the style was startling enough to take people by surprise and cause them to pause and think twice before approaching. But, like all fashion trends that spell

'danger', this one crossed over into general use and lost some of its effectiveness. A deep, Revlon Fire and Ice style red with silver and gold sparkles was the most common tone, but creative youth experimented with many different shades. Dub cutter Squingey always had a finger or two neatly glossed. Eventually, it became so widespread in the world of entertainment it came to mean simply 'cool' rather than just plain 'bad'.

The use of women's accessories was one of the ways that ghetto warriors proved their fearlessness. Any man decked out in barrettes and bows was a man to be respected - from a distance. Female accessories meant serious business. For a time, men took to wearing a single strand of pearls. But the most startling trend was to wear women's hats, the small dyed straw or felt kind with a ribbon around the crown, flowers tucked in the band, and a demi veil falling from the brim. In fact, a man dressing in women's clothing was a sure sign of danger. Criminals often used women's apparel during their crimes. Deejay Screecha nice recalled being robbed in Waterhouse, returning to Jammy's after a dance early one morning, by two men with guns dressed in 'frocks'.

Major Stitch had been known previously as Jah Stitch. As a deejay in the 70's, he recorded for Bunny Lee and had hits like Greedy Girl and Black Harmony Killer. He complained that, because Bunny Lee just released the material in the UK, he never had hits in Jamaica and remained pretty much unknown at home, apart from his work in the dance.

But in the dancehall, Stitch was well famous. He was a regular on hard core roots sounds like Black Harmony and appeared, along with Big Youth, on Tippertone. "Me and Big Youth used to go and deejay at the same time, you know. We used to deejay at Tippertone and there was s sound named Kentone where there were all these top deejays. We could talk the same way before me get shot, you know. You couldn't know who was deejaying, cause you getting the same vibes, the same style. Everything."

During the rivalry between Tippertone and Black Harmony, Stitch took a bullet in the head. The shot went straight through. The fact that he survived at all, was a miracle. But when Stitch recovered and was released from the hospital, to his surprise and dismay, his voice was different. Somehow, the injury and subsequent operation had changed something. At first he was puzzled and upset. But he managed to gather his forces and launch an impressive comeback with the song, Dread Can't Dead, for Bunny Lee. From there, he was able to maintain a successful recording career under Bunny Lee's direction, for most of the 70's.

When Sugar first brought out the sound, it was Stitch's old co-worker Jah Wise, who was handling the selecting. While Jah Wise was building up the sound as selector, Jah Stitch was operating the controls and doing all the live mixing. When Wise departed, Stitch was his natural replacement. "Sugar Minott know me from Black Harmony. Sugar Minott

know seh I was great. Black Harmony wasn't playing anymore. So, Sugar Minott come to me and ask me to come and play his sound. But he never have a big sound. Him have a little sound named Black Roots. So, I said to him, 'Sugar, I don't play small sounds. You gotta get me a big sound'. So that's how he get Youth Promotion. So, when it come now, Sugar get Jah Wise to play it. So, when Jah Wise and I come, it's two selector. So I say, 'Bwoy, I will go away'. So Sugar say, no, me cyaan go 'way. Sugar say it's me, personally he wan' play his sound. So, me say, 'Me nah go select.'" [To which, Sugar answered,] 'Then, if you're not selecting, you ha' fe go mix'. Sugar did have a big 800 mixing board and he teach me how to mix on it. So that's how I start mixing before I start play Youth Promotion. People say I'm mixing so great it add something else to the table. Then Jah Wise go a foreign. And from Jah Wise leave, I become the selector. Everywhere I go, I bring something new, with my big hat and my style - and everything was just great! (laughing) I was just born to be a star!"

With Jah Stitch, and then Talouse at the board*, Youth Promotion was an innovator in the mixing style. Since Sugar traveled frequently, he was up on the new technology and able to purchase some of the latest innovations. "We were the first sound to play Peevee amplifier. Lots of people had Crown and Macintosh," Sugar recounted with pride. "When QSC amplifier came in, we were the first ones to have QSC. Our mixing was board was special with the thing we used to lick that go kkkkkrrrraaaa – reverb. We used to lick on that

* Peter Chemist's bigger brother, Little Chemist, used to mix now and then. Peter himself, never entered the sound side of the music.

board- no other sound had that. That board was a Peevee board with a mixing console with reverb in it. So, it sound like Kkkkkkrrrrra… Youth Promotion…. KKkkkrrrraaaa. Think of it, at that time there was no other sound that could do that.

"Afterwards, seeing that we did that, other people went and got mixing boards. So, little after that, everybody went and tried to get one from America, and then they start mixing. The mixing board, all the keys used to pop off, cause when you mix too long, those keys pop off. What they did now, is make a little thing in your hand, hold it in your hand and you could just ring it like that. But that wasn't nice, cause that wasn't showing the motions. Cause when the guys around the board doing the mixing, it's like they're dancing - Buf Buf Buf, you know." That Buf Buf Buf mixing style found its way into Colourman's hit, Kick Up Rumpus.

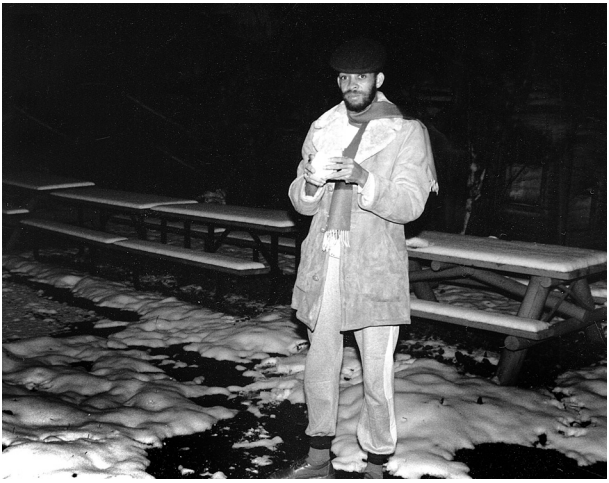


Photo: Colorman in Canada learns how to make a snowball

Working regularly, now, as the sole selector, Stitch auditioned the hopefuls. Drawing on his dance hall experience, he used to test new deejays by giving them Studio One rhythms. The supreme test came when he asked them to talk over Darker Shade of Pale.

Major (Jah) Stitch describes the way he would select, as a foundation selector, "If the artist [on the record] is a good artist, I maybe play 3 or 2 of him. If he is an artist that is current, hitting the place, I maybe play 6 of him….It's about setting the pace, you know. Like, you can't build a house and don't have a foundation. So, that's how my selecting go. I have a foundation first, then I can always add the other things onto the foundation itself.

"Each dance, it depends on the type of crowd you're playing for, too. Ca' if it's a younger crowd, you can't play so much foundation [older music]. But, you wouldn't find the younger folks coming to dance very early. So, when you reach early and playing music, older folks would be out there just listening to the music, so you would have to play a selection for those people. So, you play that and those people feel good and [when young people start to come] you start to get into the era which is the modern era."

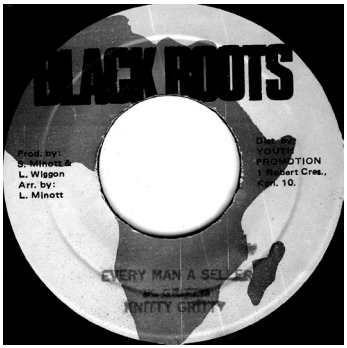
As part of the big Youth Promotion family, Stitch would pass through Sugar's yard now and then. But generally, Stitch traveled with his own posse and lived by his own rules. Sometimes, when he didn't show up at the dance, someone would be sent to his yard to tell him to come.

Other times, he couldn't be found at all. Stitch always followed his own path, never, however, straying far from the music.

Singers

A who's who of Jamaican vocalists passed through, or got their start, with Sugar on Youth Promotion sound, but only a fraction stayed long enough to have their name associated with the sound and organization. People like Nitty Gritty, and Junior Reid where there and gone in a flash, but Trevor Junior, Chris Wayne, Casseyman, Ashanti Waugh, Lloyd Hemmings and Tenorsaw stayed longer, voicing dubplates and defending the sound in clashes. Most never got famous, but each contributed something important to the music of the 80's.

Photo: Nitty Gritty in King Jammy's yard



Sugar was prone to adopting young artists that no one else had time for and working to bring out the talent it seemed that only he could see. In this, he had a much better record with singers than with deejays, but that should in no way discount the talent of the handful that he found. It was just that he found so many more singers and he stuck with them until they made it and could go off on their own. Like Nitty Gritty. According to Ken, when Sugar took up his case, "people laughed and tell Sugar, 'A whe' you a do? He can't sing'. But Sugar would say to them, 'Him have a style and him style a go work and him a go bust'. Them never believe Sugar and Sugar say, 'Alright, you a go see.' And Sugar start groom him." The next thing, Nitty Gritty was working with King Jammy making hit after hit on Jammy's digital rhythms. He was so popular that a crowd of imitators started filling up the place. Every new artist was copying that same style everyone told Sugar couldn't work.

That was the gift Sugar had, spotting raw talent and bringing it out. He could coax a good performance out of even the most recalcitrant and uncooperative of men. He dealt with some easy people and some very difficult ones, but he never gave up on the youth.

Junior Reid

Junior Reid grew up in Waterhouse, a small ghetto enclave and bountiful music area that was overflowing with talent, There, Junior grew amongst people like Don Carlos, Voice of

Progress, Black Uhuru, King Everall, Wayne Smith, Liza, Kojak, U Brown and so many others. He lived just up the street from the brothers Trevor and Lacksley Castell. "We grow together", Trevor recalls. "We play soccer together. We run up and down together. We were close. My brother [Lacksley] got Junior Reid involved in the music business."

"One day I saw Lacksley Castell with a disc under his arm." Reid recalled. He questioned him and found that he was coming from working with Augustus Pablo.* Hugh Mundell, Junior's closest friend, was already recording for Pablo's Rockers International artists co-operative. So, Junior, was eager to catch the attention of the melodica don. Pablo was willing to listen, and recorded Junior's first demo. But the first actual release, for the 14 year old Reid was produced by Hugh Mundell. Speak the Truth appeared on Pablo's Rockers International label in 1979, It was also through Lacksley that Reid met the producer from the UK, Robert Palmer, who recorded Reid's 45, Sister Dawn, and for his Negus Roots label. Palmer also introduced Reid to two young men, Sammy Tracy and Terry McDermott. Together the three formed the group, Voice of Progress, and recorded an LP for Negus Roots, Mini Bus Driver, in 1980.

In 1984, Reid started hanging around Sugar and Youth Promotion, singing at the dances. With Youth Promotion, he releasing some of the material that brought him into the public eye, including Junior Nature and the mega hit, The Original Foreign Mind. Junior Nature was Reid's

* Interview appears on www.heartical.net

Photo: General Leon with Junior Reid

first venture into self production before setting up his own JR label. He gave the song to Sugar to distribute. "Through him and me [are] bredren and things, we work together."

But it was his smash hit, Original Foreign Mind, for Black Roots in 1985, broke him big. Working "half and half", Sugar and Junior shared production, and the song was released on Youth Promotion. Reid got the inspiration during the time he spent in England. After staying away from Jamaica, he began to fear losing the yard vibes. "Like how me and Sugar go on tour, more times me feel bored. Me say, well, I would like to come home forward. Like me want to go home because me no 'foreign

mind' - stay a foreign too long, you know, loose [my] sting."

Original Foreign Mind was a huge hit in Jamaica and an influential song. It gave a name to a previously unidentified condition, and opened it up for dialogue. The common malady, that came to be known as "Foreign Mind", really represented two similar, but separate, syndromes. The first was the belief that entertainers who dally too long abroad get soft and can't compete any more at home. They lose their "sting", their yard vibe and their credibility. Entertainers readily identified with the idea. It was something they all felt and worried about. If they went on tour, would they remain competitive in the yard market when they got home? When Brigadier Jerry had first toured England, rumors were circulating that he had 'gone soft' by staying so long abroad. He had lost his edge, that special yard dynamic you get just living in Jamaica, that authenticity that just can't be manufactured or reproduced anywhere else but yard. Of course, he hadn't. But every time a local superstar ventured abroad, and stayed, people began talking.

In the second case, Foreign Mind referred to Jamaicans who dream longingly of everything from aboard, and disparage the simple things they know at home in Jamaica, treating anything from Jamaica as second class. Thus, the song introduced a new aspersion into the local lingo. To call someone "foreign mind" was to suggest that they were either a cultural snob or excessively materialistic. Thus, the song produced

reverberations in the dance as singers and deejays all came up with their own, individual, take on the issue, mostly swearing not to have contracted the dreaded 'foreign mind' already.

Junior Reid went back to his home ground of Waterhouse later in the year when he joined international sensation, Black Uhuru, after lead singer Michael Rose went back to his farm in the country. But not before having infected all the little youth with 'Junior Reid Mind'. All the under 16's just wanted to sound like Junior, and he left a lot of imitators back at Youth Promotion, trying to sound just like the Grammy award winning superstar.

Yammie Bolo

Yammie recalls how he first arrived at Sugar's door, "I was going around trying to make my name on sounds like Third World. I was going to St Andrew Primary School, so I used to go over to the school and sing for the girls and they used to buy me food and lunch and stuff. One day Knobby, who was like Sugar's right hand, saw me teaching school on the sidewalk. I was playing school. Knobby saw me and he thought I had potential- a little ghetto youth who was trying to keep school. He asked me if I can sing. I said I can sing but I don't know how to get into the business. So, he told me to come over to Sugar, and that's how it really started."

Knobby then gave him a pair of shoes which, to Yammie, was a sign, "that the road is going

to be a hard road". But Yammie was willing to take it. It was already hard living at home with his grandmother. "I used to [go to dances] sometime and when the music gets sweeter, I would end up sleeping out [i.e. getting locked out]. And then one night, I had to sleep under the cellar, with the dogs and stuff. And she said, don't let it happen again. And then it happened again. She let me in, and while I was sleeping, they beat me. They whipped me and said, 'You're turning a big man- you're sleeping out. [But] you're a little baby. Why you sleeping out?' "They didn't understand that it was my calling. I was trying to get knowledge because sometime I was going to have to take over the family. The shoes that Knobby gave me was the vibes. Because Knobby passed away. He brought me to the gateway of the music and then he disappeared. And I say, I have to learn everything seriously."

So, Yammie left his grandparents yard and came to crash at Sugar's pad. Sugar took him in happily. Yammie needed refining, both his

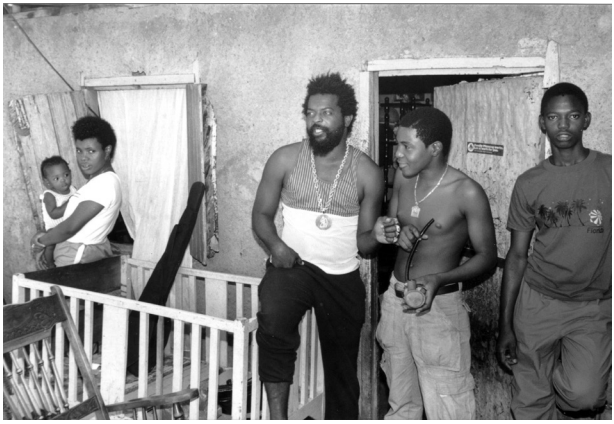


Photo: Yami Bolo holding the chalice with Junior Delgado on the left

voice and his behavior, but he was exquisite raw material. Because, despite his often incomprehensible comportment, Yammie wanted to make music really badly. And he was willing to make the sacrifices.

"I was [avoiding] the robberies, the grab chain, the real gangster stuff. My grandmother taught me not to be idle, to do something positive. So, I thought it was the right thing to do. I was surrounding myself with the music. Getting to know all aspects of the music. So, I know I was doing something good, but I need to learn more."

Like everyone else, Yammie had to start at the bottom, which meant even sleeping on the ground after a late session out of town. "The majority of the times, cause you didn't have a name and people didn't know who you are, you just had to sleep in the dew. When the truck was packed up, some people would be sleeping in the truck, some people would be sleeping with a friend. But little Yammie just got to find a table to sleep under."

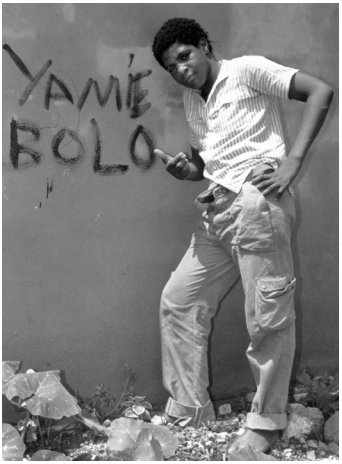


Photo: Yammie autographs the YP wall

During this time, Sugar was working with him constantly, giving him mic time at all the official dances and sound clashes. Only then was he ready to record. Jackie Knockshot recalled, "Within four days [of returning from Miami] Sugar went to Channel One recording studio with Chris Wayne, Yammie Bolo and some more to voice some tune. Before Sugar booked the studio time, he practiced Bolo to sing the song he wrote. Sugar wrote the song, 'I gave you all

my love and you disappointed me', title- Because I'm Hurt. Sugar said that day, 'Yammie, do it! I know you can do it, Yammie Bolo. Yammie, I know you can sing like Michael Jackson.' Sugar actually cried when Yammie reach the part that said, 'Because I'm hurt'. ..Sugar said, 'The girls, they kill you, kill you for this!'"

At first, Yammie styled himself completely after Junior Reid right up to using his slurs, like "danna ding ding wo-o" Junior Reid wasn't impressed."One night there was clash at Youth Promotion, Yammie recalled. "I was singing and then a guy come on the mike and say, 'Junior Reid, the two little youth [Yammie and Kirk] are a threat to you!' It cause a vibes, like it cause a real problem - a little jealousy. So, when Junior Reid see me, he say, 'Youth, stop sound like me!' and he was getting me scared! And then, Jah send Nicodemus and Supercat to come out and them said, 'Allow the little youth. 'Llow the little youth!' So, it's like Jah send two angels fe come cool him off. Cause, in Jamaica, a guy would fight you- even kill you- if you start sound like him.

Photo: Chris Wayne with Yami and friends

When a man try to sound like a next man, it's a war. Later, we became bredren. I even sing three songs for him".

Born in 1970, Little Yammie Bolo was still a teenager when we was making music with Sugar, and he was wild and free, but with a passionate desire to learn the music business. At 14, he was bleaching all night with the sound on the road and leading the line up in sound clashes. He even went to jail for a week for holding a spliff. Growing up loose and living an unstructured life, he took extra time to settle down. Into his teens, he still climbed trees, got into scraps, smoked the chalice and lived like there was no tomorrow. But he never, ever strayed from music. Music was what he wanted to do and he stuck with it, through everything

His next mentor, Junior Delgado, was helpful in starting the process that led Yammie to eventually become a devout and very spiritual Rastafarian. In 1987, Yammie had just returned from recording in Miami when he ran into Junior Delgado.

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"So, I came back and I was going to go back into my ghetto, where I was coming from. Then Junior Delgado said, 'No, I can't let Yammie go back down in that place'. So, he took us to the hotel [room] he rents. And we was living there and I started to see different lights. Cause I never used to leave my little ghetto. So, I started to notice other different place in Jamaica. I started to get wiser."

Yammie still hadn't recorded much. "Junior Delgado came and he discovered me again," Yammie reports. "He found out that Sugar had only recorded three songs and only one was released, Roots pon the Corner. So, Junior Delgado thought it necessary that this youth should be greater.

After hooking up with roots singer Junior "Jux" Delgado and his crew, Yammie could be found hanging out at Kaiso's yard, next to Channel One, still smoking the telephone chalice. Kaiso was the ital chef who toured with Rastafarian artists.

Yammie was growing up, but he hadn't quite made it. "[Junior Delgado] gave me his car to drive. I wanted to drive his car, and he gave me the car to drive and I really demonstrate that I can hold it. Until one day the police pulled me over and said, 'You're a young youth but you want to be a man. You need some more time to grow up and develop'."

In 1987, Delgado released his first album, Ransom Of a Man's Life. Then they went up into the hills to clear themselves of city life. Despite his wild ways, Yammie was a spiritual youth from his earliest childhood. "Once, as a child, I swallowed a nail and I told God that if he saved my life, I belonged to him. So, I told my grandma I had swallowed a nail and she said, 'You're joking. You're playing around'. Well, only me and God know that I did swallow that nail. And from that time, the power of God proved that he saved me and that is what has been guiding me and bringing true meaning.

Photo: Junior Delgado, "Jux"

His feelings only deepened during his retreat. "We lived up in the mountains and the hills for 4 years, getting the divine inspiration, eating divine food, lock off woman for about three years and start to focus, getting the ital vibes, the Rasta vibes."

From his work with Junior Delgado and Augustus Pablo, Yammie went on to work with prominent Rastafarian artists, Damien and Stephan Marley, and even collaborated with Wyclef Jean.

Reflecting on his early days, Yammie has no regrets. "The sound system thing and the singing was a vehicle to get me to see what I was going to do. I was listening to Bob Marley and I realized I didn't want to do the superstar stuff. I just wanted to keep the conscious music alive." He continues to work towards that goal today.

Tenorsaw

Clive Bright, who took on the nickname Tenorsaw because of his love of Big Youth, was a talented, determined, ambitious, but also angry youth from one of the poorest areas in Kingston. He rose quickly to the top of the dance hall scene, had hits with all the top producers, followed the Skeng Don crowd to Miami, then continued on to New York and was eventually found beaten to death in the bushes by the side of the road in Texas - all by the time he reached 22 years.

Photo: Pad Anthony with Tenorsaw

Maybe he lived too fast and never had time to mature and refine his judgment and understanding. He bristled at every slight, fought every perceived injustice. His intensity kept his circle of close friends small, and limited the number of producers who would work with him. One by one, they gave him a hit record and then backed away.

The one person who always stuck with him was little Yammie Bolo. Yammie recalled, "A lot of people couldn't deal with Tenorsaw because he was a youth like that. If you come fe rob him, he's gonna get angry. Cause a lot of the youths already know that the producers weren't doing a good business with the artists. But, he really love youths. When you are growing up in the ghetto, you get to love youths."

Tenorsaw fought the producers and distributors, and anyone else he thought might be taking advantage of him, but he took care of his friends. Yammie Bolo felt Tenorsaw was always looking out for him. "He was a good youth, and when the big man them used to come and try and take money off me, Tenorsaw woulda say, 'Leave the youth!' and he would start fighting to defend me. Any big guy [who] would come and want to pressure the youth- through you is a little thing and they feel you make money and them want to use intimidation- Tenorsaw would readily take them on and say, 'Hey, bwoy! Look how little him is and he try fe work.'"

Tenorsaw was scheduled to perform on his first big stage show and he insisted in carrying

little Yammie Bolo with him. "When he got this big break with the Pumpkin Belly song, he was going to do a show. Tenorsaw say, 'Yammie - tonight!' and we go up there and sing. That was my first big show. I borrow my sister gold chain – while I was going on stage, someone pop it off my neck. I was looking in the crowd to find my chain and Tenorsaw said, 'Allow that! Come Yammie!' Tenorsaw mash up the show and Tenorsaw call me on stage and I sing and the people them love it. "And I say- Wha'? This is the thing! I've been around sound system too much!"

Pumpkin Belly was the song that launched Tenorsaw, coming along in 1985 as the computerized rhythms were just breaking. His voice was natural and strong with a beautiful tone, but it was also raw and untutored. When he first tried voicing Pumpkin Belly, in King Jammy's little back room voicing and mixing centre, he sang the entire song half a tone flat. Yet, he sang it with confidence and feeling.

Saw's next big hit, the dance hall anthem Ring the Alarm (Techniques) was originally written to support Youth Promotion in the 1985 four sound clash. Sugar followed up by producing Tenorsaw's foreboding classic, Lot's of Sign, in which the brooding singer sounds his darkest. The religious overtones, that often appeared in his songs, where exploited successfully by future producers, like George Phang, who released Roll Call in 1988, Ibo Millington and Bunny Tom Tom produced the gospel sounding Victory train in 85 (Black Victory 12"), and Sugar and Peter Chemist did Who's Gonne Help Me Praise Jahovah.

FIREHOUSE
Produced by: King Tubby's 18 Drumlie Ave., Kingston 11. Tel: 92-38868
(P)(C) Dub Plate Music
Made In Jamaica
Dist. by: Tuff Gong 220 Marcus Garvey Dr., Kingston 11. Tel: 39380-4
RUDE BOY
Jose Wale & Lloyd Hemmings
LLOYD HEMMINGS
Eng. Peeps & Fatman
Rhythm Track by: King Jammy

Photo: Lloyd in the YP voicing room

Germaine Donovan released No Work Pon Sunday (John Crow) and Run From Progress on Penthouse and Sugar and Peter Chemist also released Fever and Shirley Jones. Sugar produced his wonderful Corporal Brown, and Keith Wignal produced yet another other 'old time proverbs' single, Golden Hen.

Compared with his peers, he didn't have a huge output. Yet, he is one of the most influential singers of the 80's. His songs have become

widely sampled by North American artists, and one of Jamaica's current legends, the female breakthrough deejay Lady Saw, took her name from his, inspired by listening to Youth Promotion when it played in St. Mary where she lived as a young girl.

Tenorsaw's legacy also lives on in the many singers who took on his style initially in the 80's, like King Kong and Anthony Redrose, and the many who still imitate him today.

Lloyd Hemmings

Lloyd Hemmings was a mysterious but highly talented singer who would wander Kingston, and the Youth Promotion yard, at times in rags looking like a beggar, at times dressed neatly and accompanied by his apprentice, young singer Oney. Some days more lucid than other days, his voice somehow remained crystal clear. As soon as he touched a note in the dance, people would beat down the fence. Pure 'forward'.

Sounding remarkably like his mentor, Sugar Minott, Lloyd sang harmony on many of Sugar's productions and at stage shows, as well as recording on his own. In the early days, when Sugar sang with the group, The African Brothers, Lloyd was already providing harmony. But, Lloyd remained terribly under recorded because of his distrustful nature.

A multi-talented youth, Lloyd could read and write music, and had studied art. He was always

trying to teach the younger ones who were often uncooperative students, to say the least. Lloyd grew up hanging out at studios, observing the horns men recording. Trumpet players, especially, fascinated him. He watched "their way of breathing. How they attack a note. Their expression. How the note grabs them." Usually he would be kicked out because he was just a little youth. But he always came back.

The first man to produce Lloyd was Lloyd Campbell, in the late '60s. The tune was called Africa. At one point he had the chance to join the Cross Fire Band as lead singer but it never worked out. Lloyd preferred to pick and choose his producers and he worked off and on with Lee Perry, Bunny Lee, Studio One, Joe Gibbs and Bullwackies. Tubby was the producer who gave Lloyd the biggest boost with the computerized tune Rudeboy. But Lloyd remained leery of working with producers and kept to himself a lot, recording very infrequently except for his harmony work with Sugar. In 1985, his song Don't You Know We Got So Much Work To Do came in second in the Jamaica Festival competition. He appears on a showdown LP, released by Hawkeye, pitted 'against' Yammie Bolo, who by that time, had mastered the Junior Reid style completely. He later worked with Augustus Pablo's Rockers International organization, along with several other promotion artists, with 45s on Rockers International like Heartical Decision (91), The Healer Has Come (92) Is It Because I'm Black and Fight the War (93) and Light Against Darkness (94). His LP, The Healer Has Come, came out in 1991.

Lloyd had a little protégé he was bringing into the business back in '85, a youth named Oney who lost one arm an in a tractor accident when he was a young boy. Still barely past childhood, Oney was living on Delamere Ave. with Lloyd who had been teaching him harmony. Oney said, at the time, that Lloyd is "like a school". He demanded long hours of practicing from his pupil, at home and in the dance.

An accomplished dancer as well, Lloyd was a talented man. According to Jackie Knockshot at the time, "I personally think Lloyd Hemmings is one of the best singer around town right now… Whenever he sings on Youth Promotion sound, the whole place tear down with vibes."
He currently lives and works in California.

Thriller

The young singer Sugar recruited for his organization in 1984 wasn't really new at all. In fact, Thriller was one of the originals, a pioneer of singing in the dance hall, who went way back in the history of sound systems to the mid 70's and the days of King Attarney with U Brown and Ranking Trevor.

Raised in Arnett Gardens, Concrete Jungle, from the age of 6, Devon Chambers stuck to music as the right road to follow. It came to him so naturally, singing in school and church, he decided to take his talent to the local sounds. Black Hawk used to string up on the corner-

not an official dance, just a community thing- and Thriller would hang around begging for the mic. From there, he moved on to Papa Roots (Socialist Roots), again hanging around the local community gigs, begging for a turn at the mic.

"Ranking Trevor gave me the mic one of those days and I just sing something out of my head and I sing a couple of American songs and they say, 'Yes, that guy have to stay around the sound. Anywhere that King Attarney play, this guy have to be there. He going to be the singer'. Right there, I start to work with King Attarney. They test me that day. Anywhere they go, I am there. Sometimes I get on the truck, sometimes we take bus. Sometimes I have to walk. But I have to be there because I am the singer for the sound."

Sugar used to spend a lot of free time listening to Papa Roots in those days, so when he decided to build his organization, he called for Thriller because he knew Thriller had a strong voice and good experience singing in the dance hall.

Thriller was surprised. "I didn't know Sugar before. He just hear me and send for me. I used to just listen to Sugar on the radio. I didn't know Sugar to talk to. When he send for me, that's when I get close to him now, like a brother, like he's my father.

So Thriller came on board the sound and was soon recording. As he had his experience in the dance, Sugar only needed to help him when it came to the studio, like "how to sing around

the mic, how to carry the notes…I learn a lot from Sugar". The first song they did at Channel One, One Away Man, was never released.

The song that Thriller became known for was the powerful anthem, Can't Cross the Border, originally recorded at Channel One over the General rhythm and included on the one rhythm LP, General for all Generals. Growing in Jungle, Thriller knew, first hand, what living on the boarder meant. The song became a dubplate in high demand for clashes , "but Metromedia was the sound that burst that tune on dubplate and make a lot of sounds get scared when he play it."

In addition, Thriller recorded Tickle Me for Sly and Robbie's Taxi label, Over Me, Twinkle Twinkle, and Hold Me Darling for George Phang, Good Morning Mr Walker on Jam Can (produced by George Phang), Through Me Young for Ranking Joe, Boy George a Wear Frock for Joe Gibbs, Love Line, Hide and Peep for Youth Promotion, and Give Me the Love for Harry J's Sunset label.

Still, Thriller was never known for his recordings. His fame always came from his talent in the dance where he was an early pioneer of the sing-jay style. "I used to be around the same [Ranking] Trevor dem, Errol Shorter- a lot of those deejay. I used to hear them just deejaying and getting a lot of forward, and so I was saying to myself, 'the deejay thing going to take over'. So that's why I start to sing lyrics that the deejay start to deejay- singjay."

However, even singjay could only go so far in the deejay dominated decade that followed, the 1990's, and Thriller took a break. "I leave after a while because the music business wasn't running that good. I start travel to Canada, America. Nothing wasn't going on for singers. It was pure deejay."

Now, he is back, recording and producing. "I have about three new vinyl just come out releasing in Europe. In Europe, they still like us. It's just America and this part of the world [Canada] that change to the Vibes Kartel, Mavado [thing], the younger, new set of 'dance hall' stuff, what they say is 'dance hall' now, you know".

So, Thriller created his own Thriller Music label and is working with some of the newer roots artists like Capleton, Luciano, Lutan Fyah and veteran Michael Rose. But the music he is making, he refers reassuringly to as "nice, big-people music…."

Photo: Trevor Junior with his 45, War and Crime

Trevor Junior

The first recording Trevor made was for Blacka Morwell, a song called Long Time. But, after doing the work, Trevor never heard anything further about it. So, one day when he was hanging around Channel One studio where the song had been recorded, he heard his friend, engineer Peter Chemist, mixing the rhythm from Hugh Griffith's Miserable Woman, a huge hit and one of the biggest dance hall songs of the year, 1983. "I hear it and say, 'I could do a song on it', and he

[Chemist] said, 'yea, we could do something'. So, we sat down in the studio the same night and I write the lyrics. After I sing it, I wiped off the 16 track and kept the two track because we didn't want Jojo [Hookim, the studio owner] to know that we did the song. So, we had the song selling on dubplate until – there was a man named Bya who worked with Jojo at Channel One, and he went to Jojo and said that he heard a song on his rhythm and the song is doing well and he don't know about it."

That's when Jojo called Thriller in and took the two track tape and released Hp Hip Hurray, on 45 in Jamaican and 12" in New York. The only problem was that it had Junior Reid's name on it. And so did his follow up, Joker Soldier for Tony Tuff's label, Ruff and Tuff. Confused and discouraged, Trevor joined Sugar Minott where he sang with the sound and recorded songs like I and I Time, Babylon Fight, What you Gonna Do and Mr. Wicked Man.

"Him teach me a lot of things," Trevor reminisces. "I learn a lot from him- how to sit down pon the rhythm, sing the songs. He carried me a lot and I have him as a friend. I was still amongst him before he died. I was still going to his place, doing things for him, he was doing things for me. We were good friends. He helped a lot of people. He was a good man."

Casseyman

Casseyman, also a native of the Maxfield Park area first met Sugar in Studio One. The youth

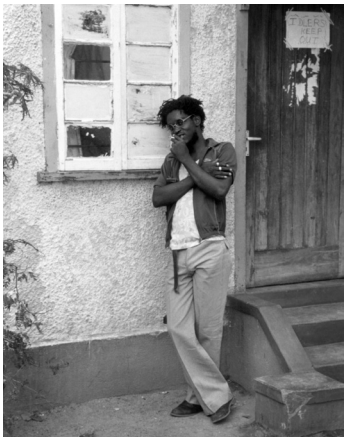


Photo: Casseyman

had gone to audition for Mr. Dodd but, despite his innate vocal abilities, his lack of experience made him unable to follow the rhythm properly, so Dodd appointed Sugar to coach him.

After he had left Studio one, Sugar ran into Casseyman in the neighborhood invited the young Caswell Jones to join his Black Roots organization where he was able to work with the youth more intensively. After school Casseyman would sit in with Sugar and the others, and slowly, Sugar taught the youth how to ride the rhythm. Sugar even recorded him over some of the versions Sugar had voiced, but none were released.

When Sugar left for the UK, Casseyman drifted away, looking for an opportunity to have a record released, and ended up with two different Canadian producers, Stan "Preacher" Lindsay and Anthony "Bunny Gemini" Duhaney. Currently Casseyman is working with Prince Jazzbo.

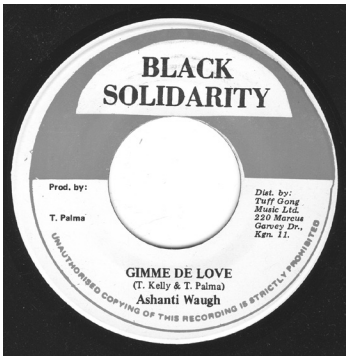
Ashanti Waugh

Ashanti Waugh grew up in Maxfield Park where he knew Sugar even before the singer's Studio One days. The two would sit together in Ashanti's yard under the plum tree and sing. Dennis Reid, Buddy Bye and Tony Tuff would come around and they would all go together to check Coxsone Dodd at Studio One. Sugar continually pushed the shy youth to audition and, when he did, Coxsone liked him and recorded a song, the original version of Bobby Babylon.

But Coxsone never released it. Instead, it appears, he gave some of the lyrics to Freddy McGregor who had a huge hit with it.

Meanwhile, Ashanti kept busy singing back-up for Sugar on the albums Black Roots and Ghetto-ology. Sugar was then located on Chisholm Ave. and Ashanti Waugh lived on Ricketts Ave. which veers off Chisholm above the Rousseau Primary School. Not far away, just three blocks along Waltham Park Road, was Delamere Ave, another star studded street, home to Tristan Palma, Phillip Frazer, Don Angelo and more. Only they weren't stars yet, only struggling youth, working together to get somewhere in the music business.

Photo: Buddy Bye with Ashanti Waugh



Ossie Thomas lived on Delamere too. His friend Phillip Morgan had gotten him interested in producing, and together they formed the Black Solidarity label. Their first recording was Tristan Palma's A Class Girl. That's where Ashanti Waugh continued his recording career. He recorded several 45s for Ossie and Phillip, including I Love Jah, Fret and Worry, Don't Feel No Way, Natty Dreadlocks., Over You, Police Police, and Worries and Problems. But none really got much response. Then, in 1986, he recorded Crime Act which immediately became a big hit. The song, aside from being uptempo and melodic, touched a nerve.

The notorious Suppression of Crime act had been passed into law in 1974. In effect, it gave the police unrestrained power to do whatever they pleased. They could enter a premise without a warrant, confiscate goods or processions, even cordon off an entire neighborhood and conduct intense house to house searches. Many people in the ghetto lost household items, their few possessions, because of this law that basically gave police the power to loot and pillage where they liked. Neither political party had the heart to put an end to something that could be used so conveniently in their favour. Twenty years later, in 1994, it was finally cancelled.

Ossie followed the hit with an album of the same name that contained several of Waugh's older 45s from the days when producer Gary Robertson and Tristan had been working with Ossie. Gary shortly thereafter left for Canada, where he

worked promoting shows, and Ashanti Waugh continued to record with Tristan and Ossie.

Little Kirk

Yammie Bolo, Little Kirk, White Mice, Rohan, and Jesse James- they seemed too young to be away from school and bleaching with the sound late into the night. But little kids were always a big attraction in reggae. Singers like Delroy Wilson where making hits in their primary school days. So, there was always a crop of youngsters trying to break into music at the earliest possible age.

Welton Irie can never forget the first time he heard of Little Kirk. "One night Squiddley [Ranking] came ina the dance at Blossom HQ with 6 little boys-

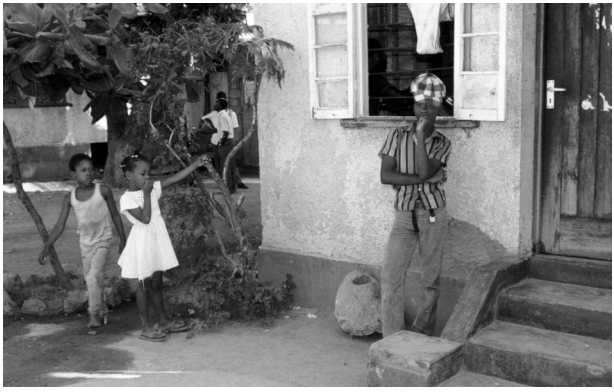


Photo: Little Kirk and his little fans

Beenie Man was one, Little Kirk was one, Andrew B, Caveman and Jesse James. Little Kirk was a little boy, deh a me knee. The night Squiddley bring all of them and make them do them thing." If they hadn't been performers, they wouldn't

even have been allowed inside, they were so tiny and young. Kirk and his half brother Beenie Man were the two who stood out that night. Soon, both were hanging out with Shocking Vibes, the sound and the label belonging to Patrick Roberts. They toured together and worked together, and then went their completely separate ways.

Born and raised in Waterhouse, Little Kirk found his way to Youth Promotion where he was recruited to fill in for Yammie and Tenorsaw at sound clashed after the two Youth Promotion regulars were singing with other sounds. While Volcano had (the other) Beenie Man and Little Harry, and King Janmy had White Mice and Risto Benjie, Youth Promotion, in keeping with the name, kept a stable of small fry on hand. Sugar was always planning ahead to the next generation and he enjoyed finding the latent talent in a youngster and helping him to grow and develop into a real professional.

In 1986, Kirk was so tiny and thin he looked half his 14 or 15 years. Unlike the rambunctious Yammie Bolo, Kirk was calm and polite, and a little shy. At first, Kirk longed to sound like Junior Reid, his hero at the time. Junior Reid and Half Pint were the idols of all the little ones back then. But when it came to recording, Kirk was the king of Michael Jackson covers. R&B and pop cover versions over computer rhythms were all the rage in the late 80's, and Kirk had such a big success with Man in the Mirror that he went on to record seven LPs, including his break through hit, Ghetto People Broke (1986 Ruddys).The song, Killer Sound, from the

showcase style album that followed, went to number 4 on the Black Echoes charts in the UK. Following the death of his grandmother, Kirk felt he had a message from God and became a devout born- again Christian. He currently records reggae infused gospel and tours, calling himself by his birth name, Kirk Davis.

Deejays

Youth Promotion was one of Kingston's most popular sounds and rated its own corner in the big four sound clashes. But what kept it from achieving the commercial recognition of sounds like Gemini with Welton Irie and Johnny Ringo, Jah Love with Brigadier Jerry, and Killimanjaro with Super Cat and Early B, was that Sugar had too many top notch singers and no superstar deejays. Which is a shame, because Sugar had some competent and innovative toasters who deserved more, but were often overshadowed by the singers. The Youth Promotion deejays were a good solid, creative bunch. Although none achieved the cult following of, say, Josie Wales or Tiger, each had his own style and unique approach.

Daddy Freddy

One of the earliest dust ups between artists was the 1987 feud between Daddy Freddy and Lt. Stitchie. The back and forth between I Roy and Prince Jazzbo in the 70's had really been a promotional idea of Bunny Lee's to

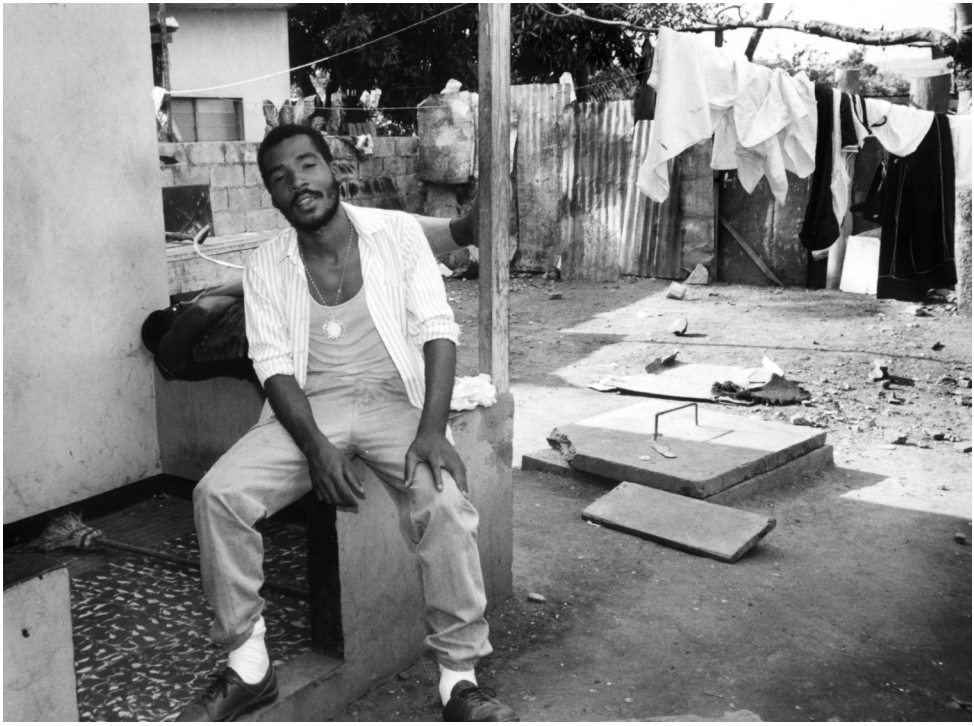


Photo: Freddie in the L&M record shop yard

generate sales. Jazzbo never had anything in particular against I Roy. But the idea, of having two deejays battle it out with words, caught people's attention. Fans loved the drama back then, and they loved it again when Freddy and Stitchie had a go at each other.

"Me and Stitchie used to curse each other in dances. We used to get a kick out of it," Freddy, who was with Youth Promotion at the time, recalls. "Then the police used to stop the dances and Sugar Minott used to be cussing me out in the morning."

Like the time they held the big clash between Youth Promotion and Stereo One. When it

came time for Youth Promotion to play, all the deejays cleared out leaving Freddie to face Stitchie and defend the sound alone. Things got too hot, and some "shottas started bus'ing guns in the air" and the police had to come lock it down. "But them time there, we were kids. It's like what Bounty Killer and Beenie doing now, but they take it to another level cause they're getting more violent with it. With Stitchie now, we just take fun out of it and I'd see him in the next couple of days, we talk and everything is good. We didn't take it personal. It's entertainment."

Sugar often tried to discourage Freddy from continuing the spat. "He say, 'Steady with your thing. Express yourself. Be creative with your stuff. Don't spend energy on cursing other artists. Even if an artist curses you, just leave him alone because he doesn't know what he's doing. Concentrate on what you're doing. You're not here to cuss people. You're here to teach people things. You're here to make people feel nice. When you're finished talking, they can say, yea, that Daddy Freddy, he make me feel good. I can pick something out of what Freddy said. I can feel good – like I go to a party when I listen to Daddy Freddy.'"

Sugar had a point. Freddy didn't need the gimmicks to succeed. During the short time he was with the sound in Jamaica, the crowds loved him and the other deejays respected him. But, ultimately, his path was a different one. "Tenorsaw said to me one time, 'You're gonna burst different from any other deejay. And he's

right, cause I bust into hip hop, rap music, house music and even drum and bass and I'm doing dub step. Cause I find these things when I came to England. They used to say, I'm a deejay before my time."

Freddy started out in Jamaica on a mainly soul sound, so he was always comfortable with foreign music. "I grew up around a sound named Wild Bunch Disco which is my uncle's sound. That was in Trench Town. It was to play a lot of disco. That's a big sound it's still going on now. They play at all the carnivals in Jamaica. I used to deejay on it and select for my uncle Gladdy.

Even back then, Freddy was playing with mixing soul and reggae styles. "Some man think I was mad, but I was going faster on dance music – like a 'ring my be-ell' and Donna Summer. When the bass line comes in without the vocal, I used to deejay on the extended

Photo:Daddy Freddie mashes up the place

version, the disco remix. I would jump on the rhythm and ride the rhythm.

"My grandma and my dad lived on Brentford road. I lived on the other side where my mother and my uncle live which is Mervila road, which is Texton road, which is Beachwood Avenue, which is where Sugar Minott them is. I wasn't really into Youth Promotion in a sense that I would want to go and deejay. I used to go and deejay Small Axe Sound, the little sounds. Until one time Colorman, came and listened to me on Small Axe one night and went back and told Sugar that you have to listen so this kid. This kid is from the area."

Sugar listened and was so impressed that he had Freddy sign up right away. Within two weeks, Sugar sent him off touring the island with the sound. "I took two weeks on Sugar Minott's sound and already I'm traveling. They took me on a tour of Jamaica. We played in all the counties- Kingston straight back to Clarendon. We played everywhere."

Then came the inevitable recordings. He did one solo- Bad Boy Patrol, and one with Pinchers, Joker Lover, for Fatis who later ran the Exterminator label. "It was Vena them times. I did a lot of songs with Pinchers, but when we were supposed to so do the shows, I was away in foreign. Sugar Minott is the man who really put me on a plane. I went to Miami first and I went to England after."

Although, by the time he came to Youth Promotion, Freddy was already a very professional

sounding deejay, Sugar did the rest. "When I met Sugar Minott, now- God bless him, the Godfather - he really polished me off now, polished off the diamond. He made me the finished article. He polished me off and said to me, 'You are good. You are good' "

So, Sugar sent him off with the core crew to tour the UK. Freddy recalled, "It was me, Yammie Bolo, Thriller, Blacka T, Colourman and Major Stitch the selector. When I went to England that time, I took it by storm." No sooner was he back in Jamaica, they sent for him again. Before he left, he had time to record the LP Body Lasher for Harry J's Sunset label. The title track was a big hit for him. Fortunate, because this time. Freddie didn't come back. He remained abroad and carved out a place for himself in the UK scene.

Fast Talking

In 1984, even 4 years after the tour by Ray Symbolic and Ranking Joe, English deejays were still speed rapping. The first generation of deejays exposed to the Ranking Joe with his individual 'fast talking' style, was giving way to a younger generation raised on the British versions. New hybrids were developing. When Joe referred to 'fast talking', he was referring to his interjections of "Bung diddley, bung diddley, bung diddley diddley diddley, wouddely…", a form of scat deejaying that caught on in Jamaica and can be heard on many records from that era. The fast talking style that was making headway abroad had morphed over the years into a distinctly

British expression. Now it was finding its way back to Jamaica with Alton Irie's 45, Speed Rapping, and with the Papa Levy hit, My God My King.

Daddy Freddy had a head start. While he was still in Jamaica, he had been listening to dance cassettes from abroad. "I used to listen to [UK deejay] Tipper Lee on tapes in Jamaica them times. I understand what they're saying, but, I'm faster than that."

Freddy could talk fast. In fact, he got it directly from the source. He was trained by Ranking Joe and used to follow him as a youth. "Ranking Joe used to pass through on my avenue to check my neighbor. Joe was deejaying Stur-Gav them times [and] Ray Symbolic. Joe used to just take a liking to me. Cause I used to say, 'Joe, I can deejay', and he used to say, 'Gwan, deejay, make me hear how you sound'. And I used to deejay, 'pheenamanah pheenamanah pheenamanah'. And him say, "Yo! You can deejay. You must write some lyrics and get it together'.

Freddy's next mentor was Lord Sassafrass. "Inside the school, they used to keep a thing named 'school set' and I used to mash up all the school sets. So, I started getting popular amongst the high school fraternity. Then I meet Sassafrass. When I met sassafras, I was like 'No! No deejay on the planet can talk like him!' He used to be my idol – him and Joe. Joe and Sassafrass used to say to me, "If you can ride Studio One rhythms, you can ride any rhythm in the world. So, I used to practice a lot on studio one rhythm. And then I started practicing on my uncle's sound - on dance music."

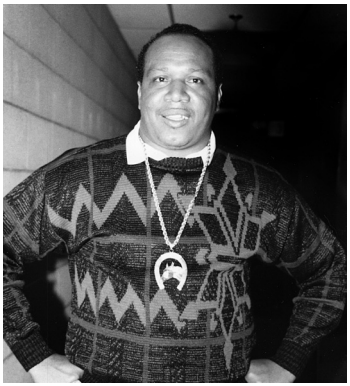


Photo: Deejay Lord Sassafrass

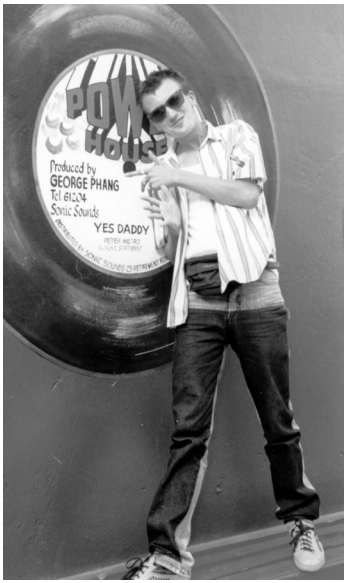


Photo: Dominic in Skateland

Over, In England, Freddy felt right at home with his fast talking style. ."I just fit in. people thought I was British. It's only when I did the Guinness Book of Records thing on the telly, they found out I'm Jamaican."

Freddy entered the contest, at first, "as a joke". "I just went along to listen to Simon Harris in Covent Gardens. I saw some guy up there speed rapping and I said, 'I could go up there and break [the record]' and Simon said, 'No you can't'. And I said, 'All right then, give me a chance'. And I went up there and the first lyric, I broke it." From there, Freddy went on to break the record three more times including twice on TV, once on the BBC and once on CNN.

Via tours and cassettes, new English styles of talking began to appear in Jamaica. Especially with the visit of white deejay Dominic, who hung out with Metro Media. Peter Metro had just come from England and began circulating a distinctly yard version of the British style.

Meanwhile, Freddy was in the UK recording a unique mix of yard and foreign talking. Freddie met Simon Harris, deejay, producer and founder of the British Hip Hop label, Music of Life, in a dance with the UK version of Youth Promotion. "You used to have UK Youthman Promotions. We were playing in a place near Melon road in Pekham. Every Sunday, I used to tear it to bits. Saxon used to come in there and we used to tear Saxon to bits. And that's where Simon Harris them came, and Asher D them".

Asher D took Freddie to the studio where he met Simon Harris face to face and gave him a taste of his 'Ragamuffin Hip Hop' style. Harris was "amazed" and recorded Freddie and Asher D- the smash hit, Ragamuffin Hip Hop. "I went back in there and I did another one, We Are the Champions- that was the big one! Then Asher D went to jail through the drugs thing and messed it up, cause we were gonna do a video. So, I went solo. Then I did Summer Time, what Shaggy did over."

Daddy Freddy was on top, but his friends back home were cynical. "When I was touring, me friends were saying, 'Oh, you're selling out the thing,' and me say, 'Man, me expand the thing!' And look at it now, everybody's doing it. They were saying, 'Freddy, you a water down the thing. Keep it straight reggae,' and me say, 'Nah, when you're cooking you have to use different spices.'"

Despite the criticism, Freddy knew where he was going and where he was coming from. He was able to reach a whole new crowd with his rap. He toured with artists like Salt and Peppa. "Ragamuffin Hip Hop open a whole lot of different doors for me. But, I always go back into the dance hall. I never leave the dance hall."

Colourman

Back in his country home of Manchester, Colourman, born Fidel Hugh Henry, used to deejay around all the small local sounds,

preaching the good word. People used to call him 'Bible Man' for his lyrics about "Keeping a session before God come", and his continual references to the Holy Book.

He was working with Cosmic Force, a sound based in Clarendon, when Sugar heard him performing. "When he heard me deejaying he said, 'Wow, that sound proper', and he told me that he have a sound that he's going to build in the future. He even tell me the name, Promotion. A couple of months after, while deejaying Cosmic Force, I was on my way to another dance in Clarendon when I went to Mandeville and I saw these posters with the name Youth Promotion with a whole heap of artists, and I remember [what] Sugar tell me. And I didn't went to my dance. I stay at that dance and ask the man dem, 'Where is Sugar?' And they say, 'Sugar's in England, but he's coming the night'. So, I wait till Sugar come and I remind him, and he told them to look after me and give me the mic and thing, and the rest is history."

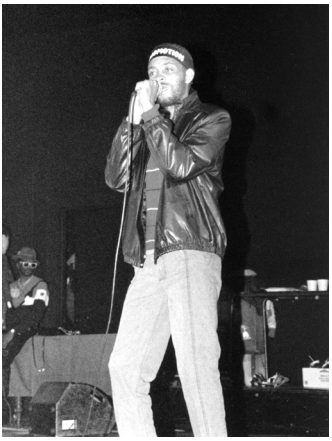


Photo: Colourman live

It was a good match. Sugar had once commented, in a reflective moment, that he wished he could build a 'gospel sound'. Colourman walked and spoke like a man on a mission from above. His composed demeanor reflected an inner calm not often seen in the rough and tumble inner city. Colourman was quiet, good mannered and thoughtful. He would inform his friends, "Inspiration comes from the father through the Bible. The Bible is one passport to heaven. The Bible is the capital for everything. From the moment you know the

Bible, everything is simple." On tour, he would write out his 'Though of the Day" in his tiny perfect handwriting and post it in the hotel corridor.

"I always have an interest in the Bible, the way it is written and thing like that." Although he doesn't call himself a "religious" person, as a youth he read widely about Biblical topics, devouring, the works of Ellen G. White, like Cosmic Conflict and The Great Confrontation.

"The first song I done for Sugar Minott was on the General rhythm, Skin It a Go Peel. I didn't do much recording with Sugar, because that time, Sugar have a lot of things on his hands, so in order for me to get a 100% look- after, I rather choose my producer. Because Sugar was dealing with himself plus million of other artists, so I just get a producer." Besides, you didn't have to directly record for Sugar to get the benefit of his teaching. "Once you be amongst Sugar, that is good enough" – you've been to the official school of dance hall music.

Colman found Dave Steele hanging around Sugar's yard. "You have all kinda people round by Sugar. Some is co producer, some is producer, some is a wanna-be producer. [I was] looking for a producer who is not over loaded." Dave Steele hadn't actually done any producing before. The Colourman album was his first project.

The title song, Kick up Rumpus (1986), went to number 3 on the Jamaican Charts, just behind number 2, Boops, and number one, the foreign

Power of Love. Then it got pulled. Radio jock Bagga Brown claimed it was because the lyrics talked about God, supposedly in a light or disparaging way. Without the support of the two radio stations, there was no way to promote a new release. Thus, both the 45 and LP suffered from an unfortunate lack of exposure.

Colourman went on to record his signature lyric, Preach the Gospel, for Winston Riley's Techniques label in 1986, over Riley's classic Stalag rhythm, along with several 45s for Super Bubble Rock and a handful for various producers including Bunny Lee and Lloyd Campbell.

Colourman would appear on stage with the flowing black robes of a man of the cloth. With his somber demeanor and his erect posture, he could appear aloof, but only until he broke into some of his more humorous lyrics, all delivered with a straight face. In his hit, Kick Up Rumpus, he gently teased the other popular deejays,

Keeping a session before God come….
Them no wan' Sassafrass - he beat too much obeah drum…
Them no wan' Toyan - he chew too much bubblegum…*
Want Colourman to chant Babylon down

Despite the lack of critical acclaim, the LP was good and Sugar knew he had an upcoming star. Colourman was becoming the topline deejay with the sound. So, when Youth Promotion flew off to England on a tour in 1986, he was the headliner. The UK received him with open arms.

* Sassafrass had a hit called Poco jump which refers to Obeah, and Toyan had a hit, Hot Bubble Gum

He was an instant sensation. But, he never came back to Jamaica. While the crew got on the plane to go home, Colourman was in London, getting used to a new environment.

England was different. The first thing he had to do was find work. Over the years, he has held the various positions of assistant librarian, bus conductor and child facilitator, as well as continuing to perform and write new material, all in support of his family of 6 children between the ages of 5 and 24. He still travels to Jamaica regularly and he still reads the Bible and keeps up with religious news through the Adventist Quarterly.

Daddy Ants

The 'reggae biter', Daddy Ants' first release with Youth Promotion, the 45 Lump Sum, was a wild debut, showcasing Ant's unrestrained style of toasting, the kind of style that gets people moving in the dance.

Daddy Ants also grew up in Maxfield Park and knew Sugar since they were both little youth. In fact, it was Sugar who gave Ants the name. "Everything in the area, every function, it's like I'm a part of it. And like ants [get] mixed up in everything. So Sugar said, 'You- Ants is your name'. And through me a spar with him and him name Sugar, and you know ants always go in the sugar pot, and I'm always with him. Is the closest friends that- ants and sugar."

Photo: The three troublemakers Dona P, Blacka T and Ants

Ants was mixed up in everything right from the beginning. He was the main deejay on Keytone Sound, and also performed on Sound of Silence. "And then Sugar come in and start Black Roots. And after Black Roots, he said, 'Ants, let s build a sound fe weself, Youth Promotion'".

As soon as Youth Promotion came on the road, all the little deejays in the area came running to Sugar looking for work. "But Sugar say, 'Check Daddy Ants and see what Daddy Ants thinks about it, reh, reh, reh,…' and me pick out the ones I think can help we push the thing."

When Sugar was out of town, Ants helped keep things under control. He ran the dub part of the studio, where they voiced and cut Dubplates. "I learned that from Sugar," Ants reminisces. "How to engineer".

"One Christmas, Sugar was saying, 'I'm gonna voice up you guys and make a Christmas album', and from that day, me start voice

up some tune." Unfortunately, apart from Lump Sum, Service Man and a couple more, there isn't much of Ants on vinyl to enjoy. "[Recording] didn't really interest me, cause I was dealing with the sound."

With the music business changing, a lot of artist got discouraged, Ants included. In February, 1998, Ants relocated to the UK. "During that time I was back home with Sugar Minott and the business was getting a way and I was saying to myself that I need to move on, do something for myself. I get a permanent visa and I went to America for about 4 months. Then a friend from here send me a ticket and I came over here and I'm just here and married and have my little boy and I'm settled down now." In recent years, Ants has been working as a civil servant for the British government. Reminded of his wilder days, Ants replies thoughtfully, "Yes, sometimes we were wild. But after time, the wildness became tameness."

Daddy Shark

Like Supercat, who had his little brother Junior Cat follow into the dance hall, and Peter Metro, who was joined by Squiddley Ranks, Josie Wales had a little brother named Daddy Shark who wanted to do what his older sibling was doing-deejay in the dance.

Shark and Josie grew together in Annatto Bay and they resembled each other, both in looks and in voice. Sharkie had Josie's same gruff vocals and

a lot of his style. But the younger brother could flash his own lyrics. People used to see him and ask if he was Josie Wales, to which he would reply, "This is not Wales. This is Shark! Josie say he is the Wale. Well, I am the whale younger brother, Shark, and we come from the ocean."

Daddy Shark joined Youth Promotion in 1985. The crew found him at a dance in Annatto Bay. The crowd there, made up of Sharkie fans, was calling out for the Youth Promotion crew to give him the mike, but the Youth Promotion crew didn't know who he was and Shark was too shy to come out and introduce himself. Finally, "Some guys take him to Sugar and say, 'Sugar, this is Josie Wales brother'", Daddy Ants, Sharkie's sparring partner, recalls. "And Sugar tell them to take him to Daddy Ants- 'Ants will sort him out'. He came and I hear him deejay and thing. He sound identically like Josie Wales. So I said, 'Alright Shark, come a town with us then'. So, we take him to town and have him with us around Robert Crescent now. So, Shark grow up to be a big man around Robert Crescent."

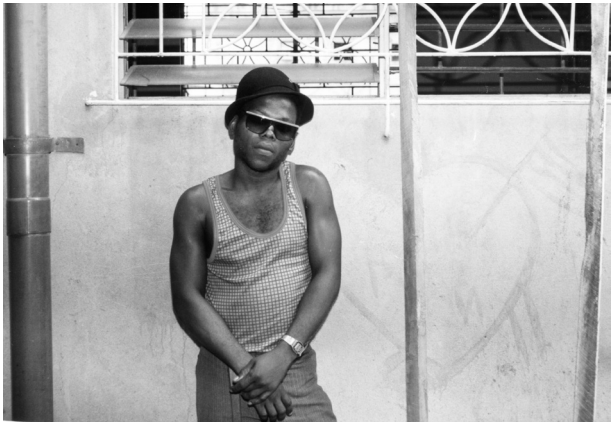


Photo: Daddy Shark in a pensive mood

Like just about everyone else in Youth Promotion, Sharkie loved to joke around, model and show off. He specialized in 'freeze poses' where he would strike a pose and then hold it like a statue. He was considering keeping little Rohan as an apprentice but had second thoughts. Whereas Kirkie was well behaved, Rohan could be harder to control. "He's so bad!" Shark complained. Sharkie was annoyed because, on their last trip to the country, "He left his shoes and everything in the truck".

Although he has relatively few releases, Shark can still tear up a dance or stage show. At a recent performance, along with George Nooks, Ranking Trevor and others, at the Stars R Us vintage concert series at Mass Camp, Sharkie got rave reviews.

Tony Rebel

Tony was born and grew in the parish of Manchester. Jackie Knockshot reported that Rebel and deejay Colourman were close and used to compete every year in parish deejay contests and, year after year, it would be either Tony or Colourman who walked away with the prize. They competed on the radio as well. "There was a radio station in Manchester named Radio Central", Colourman recalls. "I did have a friend who was working there and Tony Rebel did have a friend who was working there, so we used to go to the radio station and we used to deejay. And I won the 1981 deejay competition for Manchester and Rebel win '82."

Rather than growing up rivals, however, the two top deejays in Manchester became best friends and sparring partners. Tony had been deejaying since age 14 and passed through such sounds as Thunder Storm Hi Power and Skipper the Revolutionary. When Colourman went off to join the crew of Cosmic Force, Tony went with Destiny, a sound from Mandeville. It was when Youth Promotion and Destiny clashed that the Youth Promotion crew got a glimpse of Tony's talent. Jah Stitch especially believed in the youth. He had witnessed Tony ram up dance halls before. So, Youth Promotion invited Tony to Kingston to be part of the crew. Tony did start coming around but he never really made Kingston his prime residence. On weekends, he would come and play out with the sound, but during the week, he stayed at home in the country where he had a farm with livestock and cultivated crops.

One of the first dances that Youth Promotion played, after Tony Rebel joined the crew, was a clash against Stur-Mars held at Skateland. It was also the first time Youth Promotion and Stur-Mars had faced off in a one on one competition. When Tony Rebel took the mike and began to chant, "Iard-o, See Rebel ya from Manchester. A Rebel this, the deejay chemist" over the rhythm for "John Crow him Never Work Pon Sunday" (Tenorsaw), the place tore down. Youth Promotion, at last, had two deejay stars. But not for long.

"One night at Youth Promotion yard, while the sound was playing, he and Donna P got into

some dispute for the mike", as Jackie Knockshot tells the story. "According to Rebel, he was finishing a lyric. Donna P was anxious to get a deejay off that said rhythm. Before Tony finish chatting, to say, 'Come now Donna P', Donna P grab the mike... Tony was very frightened at that stage. After that incident, Tony Rebel seem to stop coming to the yard to deejay." Colourman had absconded to the UK and Sugar was left with his faithfuls- Daddy Ants, Blacka T and Sharkie. Rebel didn't get his big break until the next decade with hits like Fresh Vegetable and Chatty Chatty, produced by Donovan Germain of Penthouse Records.

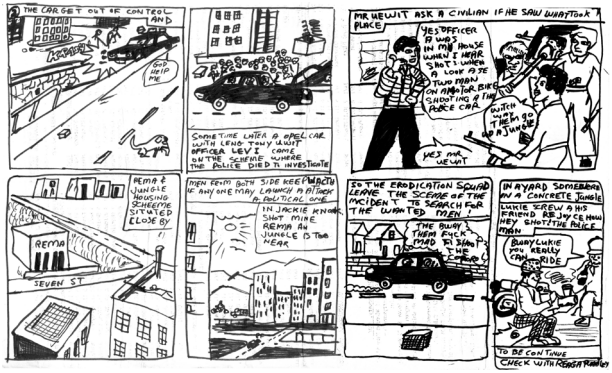
Knockshot

Sugar traveled with his own personal sound effects man, Jackie Knockshot, heard in the introduction to Sugar's 45, War and Crime. Samuel Hamilton didn't limit his self expression to gun shots. His vocalizations covered everything from Japanese sword fights to narrating a beef patty race. He was also a very talented cartoonist and he drew stories of local life. For his best sound effects, he would take out his front dentures and vocalize through the gap. He lost the teeth as a child in elementary school. Every day at noon the children had a war and the boys took positions on either end of the yard and hurled stones at each other. One of those rocks knocked out his two front teeth.

Yammie Bolo remembered Knockshot as a great friend to him, "He was one of the man

who inspire me because he was early at Youth Promotion. He came with the name Monkey Lickshot. He had this monkey mask. Then, one night, Josie Wales changed the name to Jackie Knockshot." Knockshot was friendly, funny, very trusting and kind. There was no badmanship about him at all. He always kept the crew laughing with his imitations and karate moves. But, like everyone else, he was disorganized, sometimes thoughtless and often didn't act in his own best interest.

At the time, Samuel Hamilton was living on Penn Ave. with his mother who cared for a bedridden man down the road. Next door lived Barry Brown with his girlfriend Snowbird, a white reggae promoter from New York who had been taking charge of the ailing Brown. She tried, untiringly, to get him put together enough to record again. Once, she even managed to get him to a Youth Promotion dance to sing, but he was too far gone to continue. Aside from his poor health, he was also very bitter about the rip offs and exploitation he suffered in his career. He felt so many younger singers had taken his style and were making the


THE CAR GET OUT OF CONTROL AND
SOMEBODY HELP ME
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MR WE WIT ASK A CIVILIAN IF HE SAW WHAT TOOK PLACE
YES OFFICER I WAS IN MY HOUSE WHEN I HEAR SHOT I LOOK A SEE TOJO FROM MOTOR BIKE SHOOTING AT THE POLICE CAR
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KNIVE SCREW A HIS HEAD BE BY CROWN HEY SHOT THE POLICE MAN
BARRY LUKIE HIM REALLY DEAD RIDE
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money he should have made. He claimed his philosophy was, "You never know the danger that is behind you". People in the area whispered that it was 'science'* (obeah) worked on him that caused him to deteriorate mentally.

Knockshot's varied vocalizations were just starting to appear on more recordings, like Colourman's Kick Up Rumpus, when he moved to Waterhouse and had to switch allegiance to King Jammy. After the move, he served as sound effect man for the Jammy crew in clashes and on vinyl. The necessary change in alliance, created huge conflicts for him because his loyalty was still with Sugar, even when he was in another neighborhood.

In the mid 80's, he moved to New York and was living with some friends in Harlem, and faded from the scene. He later showed up in Miami, still involved with music. After that, the reports are vague.

According to Yammie Bolo, "What I heard, he was doing good over here until some gang gave him money to buy a race horse [place a bet] and he bought the wrong horse and the real horse came in and those guys supposed to get rich, and Jackie Knockshot buy what he wanted to buy, so they beat him bad, bad, bad and he become a vegetable. That's what I heard. Somewhere in Florida they had found him."

*Science refers to Obeah, or 'magic' based on a set of religious beliefs, like Voodoo or Santeria

Jah Mikey

General, then simply 'Jah', Mikey grew up in Waterhouse but spent his time farther downtown around Maxfield Park where all the music people were dwelling. He first met Sugar at Studio One. Mikey wasn't recording, or even waiting in hopes of an audition. He was just hanging out with all the other musicians and artists who congregated in Mr. Dodd's yard to pass the time, talk, and maybe play a little music. "Every man just a come through the place and bless up the place and hold a vibes and some [might be] a recording star or whosoever- a just one unity."

At the time, Mikey was still just a kid following the thing he loved, music. "When Sugar Minott sing Vanity and them tune deh ya, me a likkle street youth". When he was attending Clarendon College, he began to follow the sounds that were passing through the area, like Zodiac, Papa Roots, Emperor Faith and another one called Ethiopian Hifi owned by Carlton Jackson who later went on to record the timeless History for Lee Perry and run the Ital International label. At the time, Ray I was the main deejay.

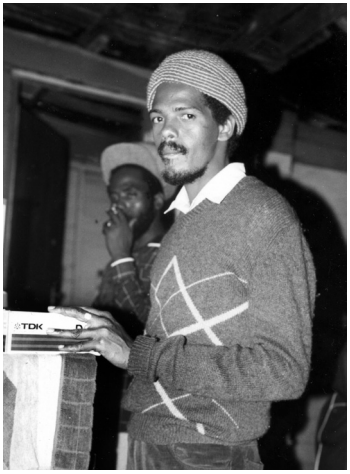


Photo: Jah Mikey at a YP dance 1984

Back in Kingston again, he would join the crowd at Delamere Ave to smoke chalice every day at noon. He also hung around Channel One where he was becoming increasingly intrigued by the technical side of music. Scientist helped him to understand the working of the console and the other equipment, where all the wires went and how to handle them.

So, he was around when Sugar returned to Jamaica in 1982 and he helped him get the Youth Promotion sound up and running, although he never officially joined the sound as a performing member. Mikey felt the sound was for the youth, the beginners, not a seasoned professional like himself. He was already busy and had no reason to muscle in on their time. "Why me never join the sound at the time, it was like [for] all the youth dem, and me already established and doing other things. Cause the youth dem never have no outlet. I and I a big grown man. I was way ahead."

But Mikey did frequently play out with the sound, that is, when he was in Jamaica. He left Jamaica in 84, again in 85, came back in 86 and finally migrated to New York in 92 or 3. Not much remains of him on vinyl from this time. In 1994, King Jammy released Mikey's 1986 recording, Foot Prints, which saw him back on the old classic from his Papa Roots days, the Far East rhythm (named for the original by Barry Brown).

"At the time, me never really like studios like that. I just like the studio to go and get some dubs to play on the sound. Cause I used to go and get dubs from singers like Dennis Brown, Bob Andy and all these man." He would take the artists to Channel One or King Tubby and voice them over a raw, drum and bass rhythm. So, began his interest in production and mixing, the engineering side of the music.

When he first settled in Queens, he made himself a little studio which he took with him when he left for the Bronx. Whenever Sugar was in town, the two would hang out for hours at another, more professional studio in the Bronx belonging to Hammer. Sometimes they would be joined by Tony Tuff.

Now settled in Sunny Los Angeles, Mikey has built up a bigger catalogue of his own recordings, but his focus continues to be on mixing rhythms. In 1999, he released Lyrical Ambassador Vol. 1. He is currently working with Sammy Dread and Shinehead for Adamari Records, and is fixing up a release of his own work for his Jah Sky Muzik label.

Blacka T

For deejay Blacka T, losing Sugar was like losing a compass and having to continue along the foggy road alone."He's my brother, my sister, my father, my mother- he's everything to me." Blacka explains with a sigh.

When Blacka T was a little youth, his father died and his mother was left to care for her brood on her own. Sugar took him in and let him stay at 82 Chisholm Ave, the famous dance hall lawn, where Sugar and several of his protégés spent their days. On the way home from school to Sugar's place in the afternoon, he would stop at halfway tree or Hope Road, "by Bob Marley [house], and where the traffic light is, when the

car stop, we used to wipe the car and get some money."

He was still a little lad when Sugar started building his own Youth Promotion sound up at Sound of Silence's place, but he was big enough to join in the work. When it was complete, he went to check it out and thought to himself, "The sound build here, I help build the sound- I'm, going to turn a deejay." It was only fitting that the personnel on the sound should, as they usually did, come from the same neighborhood as the sound, he reasoned. "So, from that night, I say, I'm just gonna hold the mic." He waited his turn and then, "I started deejaying and Jimbo and a lot of people was making noise and saying, 'Yea, yea, yea- you sound like Supercat! You can deejay!' From that day on,

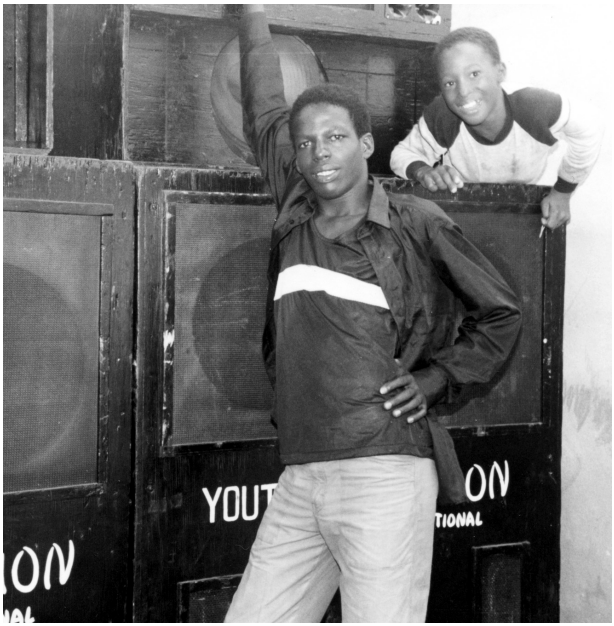


Photo: Blacka T

Blacka T stayed with the sound and stuck close to Sugar who brought him to Canada for Youth Promotion's first tour.

Oddly, hardly a trace of Blacka T remains on Youth Promotion records. Just his song Well Trash, a take off on the Hol' a Fresh craze. Instead, it was Augustus Pablo who took him on, releasing a full LP in 1991, Good Musicians. And several 45s, including Big Bad Celebrity, No Stallion, Don't Do Me That, Ethiopian Calling, Waiting For A Sound Blacka T with Yammie Bolo, A Java and Reggae Music In A Mi Heart.
In 1993, he traveled to the UK with the crew and enjoyed his stay so much that he returned several times more before settling down abroad for 4 or 5 years, playing concerts and touring Europe. Since then, he has divided his time between England and Jamaica. He has two little girls in the UK and 4 other children in Jamaica. He has been producing artists like Yammie Bolo, Colourman, Denny Ranks, Michael Prophet and himself for his own label. Currently in Jamaica, he promotes events like his current project, a fish fry where they will fry up festival and bammy, and cook jerk chicken- with music playing all day long.

The 80's draw to a close

During 1986, Sugar had continued to work for other producers to make sure the funds were always coming in. From the rootsy Hard Time Rock for King Tubby, the humorous Devil Pickney for Taxi, to the mellow All in the Game for Willie Lindo, Sugar was proving that he

could handle just about any kind of material with grace and finesse.

During the next couple of years, he moved more heavily into production, working closely with Peter Chemist to release a series of 45s on the Youth Promotion label featuring both young and veteran artists, but especially with members of the crew, some of whom had been waiting a long time to record. He had Daddy Ants' Service Man, Dona P's What a Lala, Skinny Ranking's She Lashi, Dickie Ranking's It's Like a Jungle, Little John's Josephine, Michael Prophet's Watch Your Words, the Tenorsaw LP Fever, and several cuts with himself, Bad Girl Posse, Ghetto Youths, Heavy and Ready, No Pension, Uptown Girl, Youths Them Get Bad, The Half and Ten to One.

In 1987, producers like Redman, Kangol and Donovan Germaine began taking over the charts. Redman added a sound system with the very latest equipment. Hailing from Hartford, Connecticut, Hugh 'Redman' James was working with all the top artists like Frankie Paul, Pinchers, Flourgon and Conroy Smith. Even Gregory Isaacs recorded for him. Redman's sound, carrying Ringo, Nicodemus and Cutty Ranks, got off to a big start, but soon faded away.

Meanwhile, the dance hall fashions changed. Girls had started to dress with all shiny silver accessories, from shoulder bags to boots, and the men donned Eddie Murphy hats, like the leather beret he wears in The Golden Child.

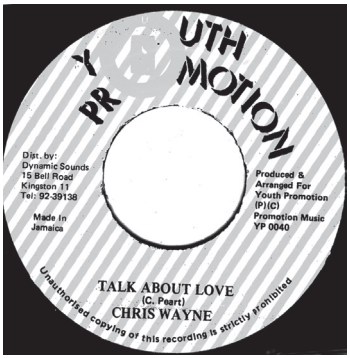
Photo: Michael Prophet gets loose at YP headquarters

People were complaining that the very best ganja was kept exclusively for export where it could fetch $400 US a pound. For local consumption, or small quantities, you had to settle for second best.

Sugar also recorded an album for Redman, Them a Wolf, on C&E, that year and a 'clash' LP, with one side by Gregory Isaacs, for Blue Trac, Double Dose. His productions on Youth Promotion for the year included the first release for " Bimbo", better known as Garnett Silk, No Disrespect, and another one- off 45 by Shinny Ranking (on the label as Squeekman Ranky), doing Chiney Man Skinny.

But reggae was moving in a new direction. The digital sound was bringing unexpected changes to the scene. Just as musicians in the US and beyond began to incorporate reggae into their hip hop and rap work, Jamaicans began to adopt more American ways. People were getting foreign minded.

The migration of ideas, taking place in both directions, was making the dance hall session all but unrecognizable from what it was in the 70s and early 80s. Welton Irie complained, "When the foreigners started coming down in the 80s, modeling, and the men standing one side posing in them jewelry and them fancy clothes, and putting the box of liquor at them foot, and the woman would go one side, the Jamaican start patternizing that now, cause they want to be like foreigners. You found less people dancing together. They stand to one side, watching who is watching, and drinking and modeling. And it's worse now! Worse, worse, worse! All the men one side, all the women the other side dancing by themselves". Meanwhile, in the US, kids were listening to rap on sound systems, with big boxes, and a 'selector' mixing the 'beats'. They were even starting to listen to real Jamaican reggae.



Into the 90's

The end of the decade saw Sugar focusing on Chris Wayne. The slim, cheerful youth had been in the background for years, waiting for the attention he deserved as a talented singer whose voice and style were very similar to Sugar's. Chris was also a skilled musician who played guitar and bass.

Chris grew up in Jonestown where he would watch in awe as his neighbor, Johnny Osbourne, sang in his yard. As a youth, he was always attracted to music and used to serenade his friends with his rendition of

Michael Jackson's Ben. He first recorded with Sugar's friend, Bingi Jean, but the tapes of his vocal were lost in a runaway suitcase on a trip abroad, and he never did the songs over. Instead, he joined his long time sparring partners, the Viceroys, to fill in for Norris Reid when Norris left the group after a disagreement. With Chris in the group, they recorded an LP for Winston Riley that was released in the UK on Greensleeves in 1984, Chancery Lane.

Following that, he went solo and started recording for Sugar's Youth Promotion label, songs like Fan Me Pretty Girl and Ain't That Enough, in the mid eighties. In 1988, Sugar produced his LP Progress, released by Heartbeat. The following year, Wackie put out another full LP, produced by Sugar, and appearing on the Japanese label, Tachyon. The new decade saw Chris making a comeback with Sugar producing a series of 45s with Chris on the Youth Promotion label.

Photo: Chris Wayne and Bigga on 'The Waltham'

Photo: Ken and Pleasure in the Robert Crescent Studio circa 1986

As the times were changing, Sugar, like all the musicians and artists from the earlier dance hall days, was trying to deal with what Jamaican music had become. With the increase of media penetration into Jamaica from the world beyond, reggae was becoming something almost foreign. Some of the musical styles and lyrical themes were a shock to those who had been raised in a musically gentler time, when a man was responsible for what came out of his mouth, and music was still played by human beings with instruments. But the new styles couldn't be ignored. Sugar was searching for ways to blend together, musically, the new sensibility with his long established, well loved approach. Sometimes his experiments worked, sometimes not so well. For example, on the joint Black Roots/Heartbeat release, Happy Together, Sugar sings over his roots classic, Too Much Oppressors, over an uptempo, digital rhythm, which makes it more danceable, but also robs it of much of its grace.

In 1993, Sugar finally married his babymother, Maxine Stowe, Clement Dodd's niece who, although born in St Mary, had grown up in

Photo: Lloyd Barnes
courtesy of Ray Hurford

New York and found her way into music by working with Dodd, then stationed in the Big Apple. During the 80's, Maxine began devoting her time to Sugar, accompanying him on tours and keeping his chaotic life in some kind of order. Aside from her connection with Coxsone and Youth Promotion, Maxine worked with many other music companies such as VP and Columbia. She and Sugar had four children together.

The Studio

Around 1992, when the record shop on Waltham Park Road had closed, the crew turned its attention to building the Robert Crescent Headquarters into a full working studio, a base for the Youth Promotion Music Center and Black Roots Recording Co. Ltd. "That time Youth Promotion was in full swing. Sugar leave go foreign, come back [with] some money, start build up Robert Crescent," Daddy Ants recalls. Throughout the 80's, Youth Promotion only had the little room jammed with equipment where they could "do our little singing and special [dubplate] thing" (Ants).

Then, returning from a trip abroad in 1991, Sugar decided the time was right. He had a bit of cash from his tour, and he was ready to make the big move. Immediately, he got all the crew involved, each one proud to be part of history in the making. "The groundbreaking, the first time you put the pick ax in the ground, it was me. Me and Daddy Shark dig up the foundation of the studio. And we had a strong guy by the

name of Nathan. He also help us. He build the foundation of the studio and the studio grow up to where it is now." Trevor Junior was there helping as well. "It was we who build the studio," He explained. "Carlton Shoe* start the studio, cause he was a mason. So, he was the one that start build the studio and then we, as the singers, put our hands together."

The other key person was Lloyd Barnes, a.k.a. Bullwackie, with whom Sugar had a long standing friendship. Wackie had left Jamaica in 1967 and moved to New York where he settled in the Bronx. There, he ran his record shop and label and worked with many of the top Jamaican artists, achieving a cult following among hard core roots reggae fans. One of the best examples of his blend of the yard sound with a little bit of a New York feel, was the 1981 LP, Poor House Rockers, by deejay Clive Field Marshall. Despite the fact that Wackie's productions were made and voiced in New York, using local, ex patriot musicians, he managed

Photo: Sugar does a little early morning mixing

*Carlton Manning from the rock steady group, Carlton and the Shoes

to achieve a unique, and credible, roots sound. During this time, Wackie also ran a sound system to showcase his productions.

Sugar used to hang out at Wackie's studio whenever he was in New York working. Sugar just liked to be around music and participate where music was being made. They worked on several projects, starting with the 12" 45, Sometime Girl, in 1979 (released in the UK in 81).

Lloyd had been thinking of returning to Jamaica to build a studio there and start fresh. When he saw his longtime friend and associate with the foundations already under construction, he joined the operation and relocated his base to 1 Robert Crescent. When the building was ready, Wackie made it into a studio, installing the padding on the walls and the new electronic equipment. The facilities handled 8-24 tracks.

After a few years, however, the friends went their separate ways and Lloyd left the studio to be run by Sugar son, Danny, with Sugar's brother Ken, while he returned to New York and set up shop at 225th Street and White Plains Road, right above the Moodies Record store.

Dance Hall changes

Another of Sugar's most cherished projects, and a significant contribution to his community, came to fruition in 1998. His annual Christmas event, Reggae in the Hills, was held December 25 on the grounds of the Sargeantville All Age School,

Harkers Hall, St. Catherine. Not just a reggae concert, the day would start at 10 am with games and rides for kids. The whole family could come and participate in the contests and the talent show. Only in the evening did the event become a stage show with all the biggest names in Jamaican entertainment, new and old.

It was just a couple of years later that the sound stopped playing. Dance hall wasn't the same as it has been in 1984 when Sugar created his own sound and stocked it full of talented youngsters. Nobody wanted to go to a rub-dub dance anymore. So, Sugar let it go. The crew felt let down and a little abandoned. Blacka T commented sadly, "[Afterwards,] we [the artists] just do some little show. There is no more sound, so we just have to do some tune or some dubplates".

The entire dancehall structure had changed so completely, there was nowhere left for Youth Promotion to fit in. Sugar Minott often complained that everything had started changing when Stone Love came along in the early 90's. First Stone Love started playing huge street sessions for free Thursday nights at Crossroads, and that took the audience away from every other sound, because no one can compete with free. "How can we compete with Stone Love if he's gonna play for free?" Sugar lamented. That wasn't the only change. "Then these bar people came with a thing called Round Robin- you play at my bar today, then we go to Harry's bar tomorrow. They have a syndicate of people who joined this. They have

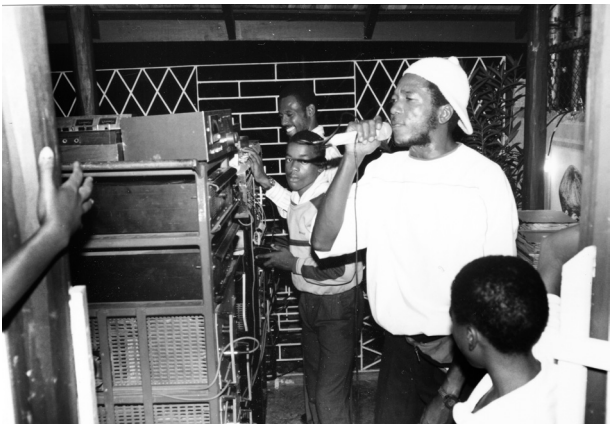


Photo: Pompidou on Jammy's sound

a pool of money. Look, you have to pay to be in the syndicate. You pay your money and they tell you when it's your time to play. Now, Youth Promotion was a ragamuffin sound. We wasn't no bar sound. "

Dancehall, as it had been known from the beginning, was in big trouble. Soon, the sounds weren't even playing outside anymore. "Then they went into a club," Sugar continued. "Now they're taking their dance into a club, a place called Tropics and they are paying $20 to go in. People go in there because they are playing funky, they are playing whatever, in New Kingston."

Once the Noise Abatement Act came into effect, in March of 1997, dances in outdoor venues were sharply curtained. Under the new law, sound had to shut off at 2:00 am., and, even worse, they actually had to be turned down at midnight. And if that wasn't enough, the government introduced a series of bureaucratic measures that had to be fulfilled in order to play out.

Noel Harper, owner of Kilimanjaro, explained "What happened was, we had a lot of venues allocated all over Jamaica. In order to keep these dances people had to get permits and Jamaican people are basically very laid back, relaxed and can't be bothered. And some of these promoters felt that they wasn't going to seek any permit, and when they promote dances, the police would come and lock it off. So, there was a decline in the amount of dances that would be kept. And then some promoters wasn't prepared to risk their money gambling in something they might not make back any money."
Meanwhile, the music had undergone a radical transformation with the advent of the digital age. For one thing, rhythms were getting progressively faster. Musicians using the drum machine, tended to pump up the tempo. Instead of the loping one drop, the beat went pounding ahead like a horse at full gallop.

"They don't talk about the creators of this style..."

To match the new pace of the computerized rhythms, the deejays were talking faster and louder. It opened the way for slackness deejays to come back into the dance and start talking X-rated lyrics again. Influences from American music were creeping in. "The younger youth, they more leaning on the hip hop," Deejay Pompidou observed. "They mix the hip hop with the reggae. They take some of the hip hop beat and put it towards the reggae and give you the uptempo, get the beat more up, more than the 'one drop'."

Then Beenie Man became an international sensation and people began to think he embodied all there was to know about

Photo: Sugar feels it in Toronto

dance hall. The older generations began to resent the easy fame, the fast money, the young artists were achieving. "They don't talk about the creators of this style," Sugar complained. "They only talk about Beenie Man like it just started with him. Like there wasn't dance hall before. And they are trying to say dance hall is different from reggae- and that's rubbish."

Sugar was clearly getting frustrated with the lack of recognition he was receiving after dedicating his entire life to uplifting the music and supporting the youth in the ghetto. He had spent years in the role of impresario, discovering some of the most talented new singers in Jamaica and grooming the raw talent, only too often to see the artists go on to higher heights with other producers, and then come back and complain that Sugar 'never paid them anything'. Meanwhile, because his time and money were plowed right back into the ghetto, Sugar was never completely free to break out on his own and achieve the distinction he certainly deserved based on his tremendous singing

and songwriting talent. Sugar was right in the middle, and getting no thanks from either side.

One of the things Peter Chemist remembers most about Sugar was the way he put himself out on a limb to support those around him who needed it most. "Seeing Sugar, and looking back, it makes me appreciate what he tried to do. I think he took on a lot of responsibility that wasn't his. Cause you're talking about living in a ghetto area, everybody is looking for something." Unlike other producers who went home to their nice communities after work, Sugar lived surrounded by all the artists he worked with. Inevitably he had to deal with a lot of problems others avoided simply by being unavailable. But Sugar was always available, 24 hours a day.

The lack of appreciation began to wear away at him. "Bunny Lee was on the radio, cause this is reggae month, and he didn't call my name," Sugar complained once in a pensive mood. He recalled when Bunny Lee and the other producers were taking one rhythm and putting every artist they could find on it. "So, now I don't get no credit, cause I wasn't [doing the] regular [thing]. I was doing Ghetto-ology. I was doing River Jordon. I was doing Black Roots. And those things which were not a part of the whole jumble up jump up."

Tamar remembers Sugar for having given everything his had to music, both his own and that of his artists, and of never getting the credit he so richly deserved. "He ate, sleep and breathe music, and I think he never got the respect he deserved

from the music industry. This made him very sad even during the time of his death. He often complain to me with tears in his eyes. He was a GREAT musician, who did a lot for Reggae Music."

Sugar had carved a unique path for himself in reggae and stuck to it where others would have caved in long before. And he found, as is common in reggae, gratitude and thanks are often in short supply.

Sugar had carved a unique path for himself in reggae and stuck to it where others would have caved in long before.

But Sugar had a special kind of genius that usually does go unsung. He knew how to animate artists, how to get the best from the people he worked with. Peter Chemist felt it all the time they worked together: "He's a singer. He's not just a guy in the business. He knows! He sees and he knows, like, 'This guy have something fresh, let me build on it'. I mean, I had ideas and he brought it to the forefront. There's a lot of people [used to] tell me, 'Oh, you can't do this on a record', and so forth. No, not with Sugar. You bring what you got to the table. And I wasn't shy of asking questions cause I wanted to learn stuff. That was the beauty [of working] with Sugar. He wouldn't hold down, whatever you had to offer. He would help you fine tune it."

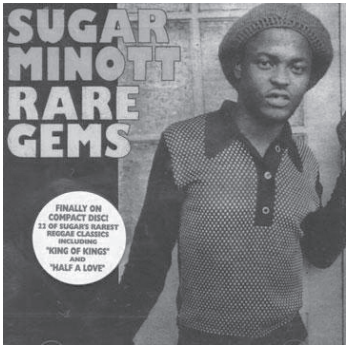
Throughout the 1990's and the early 2000's, Sugar kept releasing his own productions while singing for other producers. Sugar kept pressing ahead with LPs like Happy Together, 1991, released by Heartbeat and Black Roots, Hit Man in 1992, Black Roots, and Run Things, 1993, VP. In 1994, he recorded Breaking Free (RAS Records), for deejay Tappazukie which,

although it had some thin computer rhythms, was a solid production with great singing. RAS also released International, in 1996, and the year after, VP released Musical Murder, and in 1999 he did Jah Makes Me Feel Good for the German label Kille. In the production end, he began a collaboration with Scientist in 1996. Together, they produced many 45s for release on the Youth Promotion label.

In 1999, he and Peter Chemist came back together again and released an update of his classic, Easy Squeeze (M16) as the title song on an LP for World Records. Chemist recalls, "I hadn't seen [Sugar] since I left England. I did an album for World Records- the last set of work I did for Sugar was [done] there. We redid the M16 track Easy Squeeze. In that part of his career, it was like he was just winding down. It was just sad to me, cause I knew how much talent he had. There's not a lot of people who can sing. Some people got good voices, but not a lot of people can sing. Sugar Minott could sing".

Then tragedy struck. Sugar's oldest son, Alton Ellis Minott, died. He had been working in the music business from the early 90's, producing young artists for the Youth Promotion label. He did the first recordings for Fia Rose and Ardru Anthony, and worked with Horace "L.A." Lewis. As Blacka T explained, the youth was living a troubled life, when illness overtook him. "He catch something. It was about 2000. Sugar Minott take all his gold, his watch and everything and throw it in the hole [grave] and he cried. Sugar Minott was breakdown because Alton was the only one that

resemble Sugar Minott. He look just like him, same hair- everything"


SUGAR MINOTT
RARE GEMS
FINALLY ON COMPACT DISC! 22 OF SUGAR'S RAREST REGGAE CLASSICS INCLUDING "KING OF KINGS" AND "HALF A LOVE"

Greatest Hits

Sugar was still recording here and there, Leaving out of Babylon for the French label, Discograph in 2001, and Brown Sugar Granulated Sugar released by Soul Jazz in the UK in 2002. But, the past was catching up with him as the compilations and greatest hits albums were already starting to appear a- common an auger of artistic decline.

First, VP presented Nice It Up: The Best of Sugar Minott in 1998, which, on its own, is not so odd. In reggae, quite often an artist's first LP will be called 'The Best Of….' leading many an artist to ask why the producer was writing him off so quickly. But more discs in the same genre soon followed.

That was followed by Greatest Hits, (Dressed to Kill, UK) in 2000. Then, in 2002, came The Best of Reggae Live Vol. 1 on Interbeat Music, and the following year, In a Lovers Roots Style on Mafia and Fluxy. In 2006, Tad's Records in New York released a limited edition 2 CD set, A Tribute to Studio One with 36 of his early songs with Coxsone Dodd, like Ten to One, Never Give Up and Just Another Girl. Soul Jazz also compiled Sugar's Studio One hits into At Studio One, in 2005. Moll-Selekta, in Germany, put out The Roots Lover: 1978-1983, the same year, with cuts like African Girl, No Vacancy and Slice of

the Cake. VP celebrated Sugar's career with an installment of their Reggae Legends series of compilations, a box set of four of Sugar's 1980's LPs produced by George Phang.

Easy Star began to unearth and release older music with a vengeance. They put out Ghetto-ology on CD along with the companion dub. Then they put together a CD of 20 tracks from the golden age of dancehall and called it Sugar Minott's Hidden Treasures Volumes One. For the Volume. Two, they assembled 20 cuts from Black Roots, with artists like Johnny Osbourne, Sugar Minott, Musical Youth, Ranking Toyan, and Little John, including 10 previously unreleased songs. On the CD, Rare Gems, Easy Star took 22 tracks from between 1979-1986, this time not the hits but the more obscure selections.

After the release of so much older music, an artist starts to look dated. Because of this, Sugar's 2008 album, New Day, was being heralded as his 'comeback' LP but, really, he never went away. He had been working the whole time

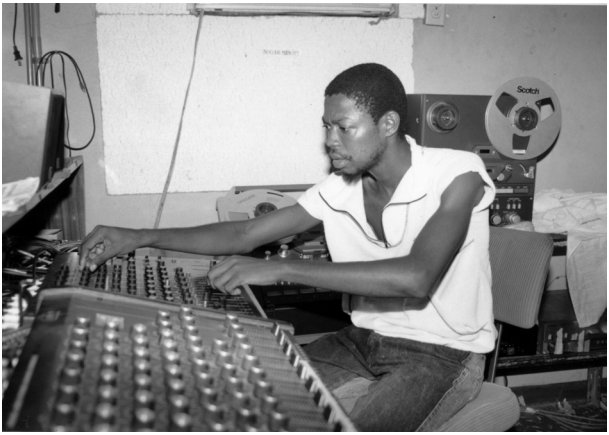


Photo: Ken at the controls

on new material, even as the greatest hits discs were closing in on him, like Breaking Free and International for Black Roots and RAS, From the Heart for Wackies and his work with Chemist, Easy Squeeze. Still, New Day was a bit of a break with his tradition. Released by Stop, Look & Listen Records, the CD contained 15 cuts of all new material, still danceable, still reggae, but with a soul derived production. The first song, Getting it On, features the instantly recognizable voices of Josie Wales and Ranking Trevor, and the title track, the thick, intense New Day, features Toot Hibbert of the Maytals. The softer, melodic Need Love is Sugar 'ina lover's rock style', with a touch of soul.

Sugar's very last album, Raw Sugar, was slated for release in July 2010. He had his son, Danny 'Blae' Minott, working with him on this new project that was intended to be a return to the music he really loved, the original dance hall of the 80's. But Sugar never made it that far.

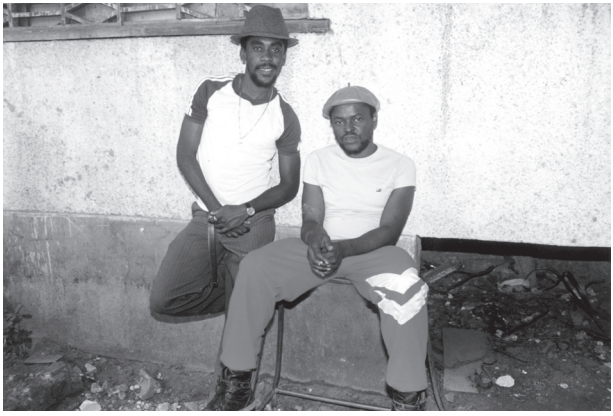


Photo: Pleasure Minott and Sugar

People had been increasingly aware that Sugar's health was not holding up. In the spring, Sugar had missed a performance in Toronto due to chest pain. He was hospitalized in Jamaica and couldn't travel, so his distraught, but determined daughter and protégé, Tamar, aka Fire Pashion, came in his place and performed his songs.

But no one really understood just how serious the condition was, until July 10th when he was rushed to University Hospital of the West Indies, Mona where he died. Sugar was 54 at the time.

Sugar's death seemed to suck all the life out of the Youth Promotion operation. The studio stood all but abandoned. Blacka T reported, sadly, that Ken Minott, and the rest of the crew, had disappeared after the funeral. "They don't come around. You hardly see them. When Sugar Minott die, they [are] completely nervous and you hardly see them there".

Typical of Jamaica, where rumors still circulate wildly and the truth often remains buried beneath a mountain of superstitions, people began to attribute Sugar's ill health to all kinds of things. Blacka T continues, "The vibes was so tense that everyone was upset at the way Sugar die. They were saying they poison him, that it was 'science' *- cause he was so young." Without the 'Godfather' to guide and inspire them, nobody knew quite what to do. Sugar had been their trusted leader for so long. A whole generation had grown up depending on him. Blacka T tried to keep a little dance by himself,

*Science refers to Obeah, or 'magic' based on a set of religious beliefs, like Voodoo or Santeria

but felt Sugar's absence looming large in the foreground. It had always been Sugar. "He was the master. He's the one who go out there and get work for us." The crew was left like a bunch of orphans. Without Sugar, who would push them to try new things, to do something on their own? Who would get their visas to go 'a foreign'? Who would give them a chance when no other producer had time to listen?

"He had so much work to do…," Blacka T concluded. Who would do that work now that the Godfather was gone?

Funeral

The whole country came out to bid farewell to the King of the Dance Hall and Jamaica's sweetest singer. On August 1st, 2010, crowds gathered at the National Arena in Kingston. People attending were requested to wear all white or Red, Green or Gold. The speakers came from all over the social map- from dignitaries like Dr. Peter Phillips of the Peoples' National Party, Dr. Donna Hope-Marquis from the University of the West, Ministry of Culture representative Syd Bartlett, Dr Michael Barnett, Sugar Minott's mother, and finally, Sugar's daughter, Tamar 'Fire Pashon' Minott. .

The musical tribute that followed the speeches featured The Silvertones, Bongo Herman, George Nooks, Errol Dunkley, Derrick Harriot, Phillip Frazer, and Bunny Brown, all backed by Lloyd Parks and We the People. Tristan Palmer

and Little John sang one of Sugar's most loved songs, Never Gonna Give Jah Up.

Sugar's body was buried at Harker's Hall, in the Bog Walk area of St Catherine, where his father and son Alton are buried. According to reports in the local papers, he is survived by his mother, 14 Children, 3 Sisters, 4 Brothers, 19 Grandchildren and 6 Baby Mothers.*

His Career

Sugar never did leave the ghetto. Despite the fact that many of the artists he grew and developed had long since cross the invisible boarder separating the two independent worlds, Sugar stayed behind with his people and kept adding new members to his ever expanding musical family. His career spanned almost 40 years, over 60 albums (27 of the albums he produced), hundreds of 45's, who knows how many hits, and countless songs that have touched people's hearts or made them see the world a little differently.

Brother Ken recalls. "Sugar was always working, always singing. Every album that Sugar make, you know it's going to have some tune about Jah He was a god- fearing individual, and he was passionate about his music. He loved to have the artists around him, and he teach a lot of youth and give them guidance along the way. He was a people person, a family person, he loved everybody's kids, he loved everyone that come round there, and he deal with them just the same. He had a big heart.

*although, according to Black T, a good 10 babymothers attended the Nine Night.

Always telling you to hold up your head, keep the faith, believe in yourself, don't give up- that's him. You can come from nowhere and check him fe something, and him nah know you, and him give you and you gwan. You come for a dub[plate], and he nah know you and he just sing the dub and give you and you gwan. He love people. When you feel like greeting him, you can't just say 'Sugar' or Lincoln or whatever. You have to give him a hug. He love everybody who come around. He was just a wonderful human being."

"Sly and Robbie said it," Peter Chemist commented." He sings on some terrible rhythm tracks and makes it sound good. He can sing multiple harmonies. Most artists can't even sing two. And performance on stage! That was something else, to see him work."

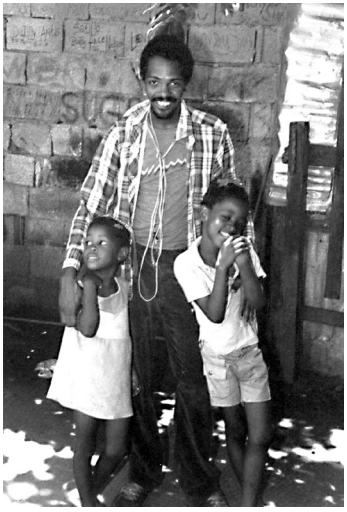


Photo: Mikey with Debbie and Tamar

His daughter, Tamar reflected on her dad's decision to remain in the ghetto, while so many colleagues were moving up into big houses in the hills. "I think he sacrificed his career and riches to stay in the ghetto to work with yute because he wasn't selfish. He had a dream and a vision, which we, as his children, will try to continue. He never wanted to turn his back on his people. He believed in other talents and wanted to help them to make something of their lives. Because he knew how hard it was for him when he started in music, and just wanted to help others to showcase their talent. It's the only studio you could come to and the gates were wide open, all were welcome. He was just a loving and humble person who wanted to see others excel."

Photo: Black T, Talouse and the little Minotts, Tamar on the right

"Sugar is a struggler", Jah Mikey recalls. "Sugar is a youth whe' kind. Him woulda give you everything. A him teach me the singing. Sugar teach me the whole of singing. I can sing just like Sugar Minott now. The man used to have the most energy on stage. Jah know, star. Wish it was yesterday. I miss him. I think back and I reminisce. Right now, I want to do good things to represent them man there. Him a my friend, man."

Daddy Ants also remembers all the things he did for the people around him. "Lots of good man! I don't even know where to begin. People just come and start crying to him. And before he even gives [to] his children, he gives the people who was crying. Instead of give we the people that was around him, he give the people that was crying. So, everybody start come and cry to Sugar. It's like he has a soft heart, so from somebody come and cry to him, he just let anybody have anything. He was good to everybody."

"Sugar had done a lot of great things!" Blacka T explains. "He is the first one that put me in a studio, show me how to use the microphone, buy me shoes. He's the first man that buy me something to wear to school, the first one who take me in a plane go a foreign. Sugar Minott was my father, my brother, everything to me. He's the special one. Without Sugar, is like nothing."

His daughter Tamar remembers a story where he "took off his shoes and gave it to a yute [youth] who didn't have any shoes." And, that wasn't an isolated event. "I remember him being at Robert Crescent and making sure everyone in the yard had food to eat, it never matter if he knew them or not," Tamar continued . "My mom told me

Photo: A jubilant crew with trophy from the four sound clash

one time he came from New York and brought some clothes for me and he left to Maxfield Park and came back and took back some of my clothes that he had bought me saying that he was going to give it to a little girl in Maxfield Park because she didn't have any. He told mom that he could buy me more on his next trip, but that the little girl didn't know when her parents was gonna be able to get new clothes for her again."

Despite having to be on the road so much of the time, Sugar made sure he spent time with his kids and tried to impart to them his values and his love of music. Every year, he would take them to Sunsplash and tell them, "Look, this is what Daddy does."

"He wasn't like the other regular working 9 to 5 fathers. He would leave almost every week to travel overseas for shows. I would always cry and didn't want to eat whenever he left. He would sit me down and tell me that, 'Daddy gotta work so I can buy your pretty clothes and toys'. He never had time for PTA meetings etc,

Photo: Ken cuts a dubplate

but we understood. That this was what daddy did for a living. He would make it up to us by taking us to all the Summer Festivals like Reggae Sunfest, Sunsplash etc. He would even call us on stage to dance. Overall he was a good Dad, who loved all his children and would have died for us. He was my best friend, I shared everything with him. If I had a problem, he was the first one I would call for advice. I was always close to him from I was a child, always wanting to be around him. I miss him dearly".

Kids

Several of Sugar's children have followed his footsteps, most notably his daughter Tamar "Fire Pashion" Minott who has her own thriving career in music as a deejay/singer, and Danny who is an engineer in the studio.

"I remember dad putting us on boxes to stand on because we couldn't reach the mike"

As a little girl, Tamar used to watch her father performing on stage, with all the excitement, the people bawling out and dancing in the aisles, and she would think to herself, "I would love to do that someday". She didn't have to wait long. When she was only eight years old, she made her first recording- for her dad. "It was a song called Reggae the Beat, with my siblings. I remember dad putting us on boxes to stand on because we couldn't reach the mike." Even then, she knew that, just like her dad, nothing but music could ever satisfy her.

She was in the right family. Sugar taught her well. "He was the type of teacher who wouldn't

stop until you got it right. He was a perfectionist! He would have me doing one harmony over and over and over until I got it. Musically, he thought me how to be a good artist. He said, 'Even when you feel sick, as a real artist, you still go out there and perform one hundred percent'. He told me that I have to love what I do, give it your all. Practice and you will become perfect. Do good/positive music. I try to give nuff energy on stage, just like he did.

"He tried to help everyone who needed help," Tamar remembers. " He was very energetic and full of life .If you wanted to hold a good vibes, just go check Sugar. A man who always had a positive message. Kind hearted, jovial, a good brother, son and most of all a good father. He loved his children. I loved my father very much, may his soul RIP."

Where are they now?

Sugar's mother still lives in the country, in Ewarton, St Catherine, with members of the family. Ken Minott stays with her most of the time to comfort her in this difficult time, and commutes to the studio in Kingston. "I'm there with mom, trying to keep her focused so she don't have her mind on her son so much, cause she has her moments still, look back [and remembering] her son."

Earl still lives in the UK where he discovered, and was the first to record, a young singer

called Mikey General. "He was an unknown singer then. I was the first person to voice him. From that point he started getting bigger. I couldn't manage him so he went to dub vendor, when he went to Dub Vendor he did an album, Sound Boy Killing, and on the cover, there was a coffin. That wasn't a good idea- you are promoting yourself to be dead. And that's what it really turn out to be, because from that instant, he become nobody. Then he leave and go to Jamaica now and start link up with Fatis. Fatis had Luciano at the time, and that's when it work out and he come back as Mikey General again." And one of the most popular new artists around Jamaica today.

Derrick Howard lives in New York and is working on pressing vinyl of his old catalogue which consists of unreleased roots material from the 70's and 80's. He has revived his Progressive International label and released songs like

Photo: Buddy Bye

The African Brothers' Still Tongue, and one with him and Ranking Joe called Roots of Black People.

Peter Chemist migrated to the US in 92. "I kinda look at the music and it's going downhill. I need to find a different career. When I came to New York, I met people on the street that was selling me my own music for 5 dollars. If I can spend so much money to do this in Jamaica and a guy can be on the street selling it to whoever- what's there for me? I migrated over here and it took me a little while to get my stuff together."

He returned to Jamaica briefly in the 90's, to make one last effort in the music business, but reality soon set in. "I took my [three year old] son with me there and I was like, I can't be living in Jamaica, doing stuff for people, going through the same thing I did [when I was 15]. I'm a grown man now. I'm not going to go through all that sufferation. It's starting to make me think different ways. Music is about love, beauty.

Photo: Yellowbird alone in the L&M record yard

Everyone loved Sugar. He drew energy and inspiration from being around his friends and family.

And for me to have these type of feelings, I have to let this go. I stopped doing music. And I came back here".

At home in Maryland, Chemist found a new pathway. "When I left, I was in the automotive business, I was prepping cars to get them ready for painters. And I had good vision for colors, so they let me select colors, mix colors- cause I would get a good match. So, when I came back I decided I would take that on full time. Plus, my son used to walk on his tippy toes so we had to do surgery with him. His foot was in casts for a couple of months and then I had to do therapy with him. So, I decided, let me do something where at least I know I have a steady income. So, now I'm a professional painter" The beautiful jobs he's done on some fancy cars can be seen on his face book page, Donovan Peter Chemist Thompson.

As for the crew, Dona P passed away. "He got shot. Very bad," Thriller explains, "But that's how Jamaica was running and if you don't know what you're doing, life change up with some person gone on into a different business from music, so there he loose his life."

Buddy Bye also passed away, but Skinny Ranking is in Miami. Danny, the cook, is in the country. Lenky Roy is in California. Jimmy "Blacka" Brown died several years ago. He was riding his bicycle when someone came up from behind and shot him. Keith Hartley has also passed away. Brother in law Lloydie is living in Ewarton with Sugar's

mother and family. Pleasure, in a wheelchair as a result of a stray bullet he received shortly after moving to New York, now travels goes back and forth spending a month in the Big Apple and returning to Jamaica. Bingi Jean also moved to New York but has since died of a heart attack. Chris Wayne is in Massachusetts, and Ashanti Waugh is still in Jamaica.

Major Stitch continued to play the sound as long as it lasted and then continued to freelance in Kingston. Unfortunately, his health has been deteriorating lately. He suffers from Diabetes and can't always afford the medicines he needs to keep his blood sugar level stable. He can still be found at Princess Street.

In Memory

Everyone loved Sugar. He drew energy and inspiration from being around his friends and family. In fact, his friends became like family to him and he became a guiding figure for so many youth.

Peter Chemist always looked up to Sugar, "He was one of the key persons in my life. Growing up, I looked at him as a bigger brother." No one who met Sugar could fail to have been affected by him, and so many people still carry a little bit of Sugar around inside them every day. "It's like everywhere I walk," Blacka T explains, "I'm seeing Sugar Minott, same way. He mean everything to me". Which made his loss all the harder to bear for those close to him.

Sugar's legacy continues in his music, his teachings, and the way he lived his life.

"People don't know how much I miss my brother," Earl confesses. "If they could take everything- all the records, all the money- and my brother could just come back, I would be so happy. That was our dream, that we would get old together, so I could help take care of him. Cause me and Ken always talk that. It have to be me and him who is gonna take care of Sugar. But it's all gone now. All of our dreams have gone and sometimes, when I think about it, it just kill me".

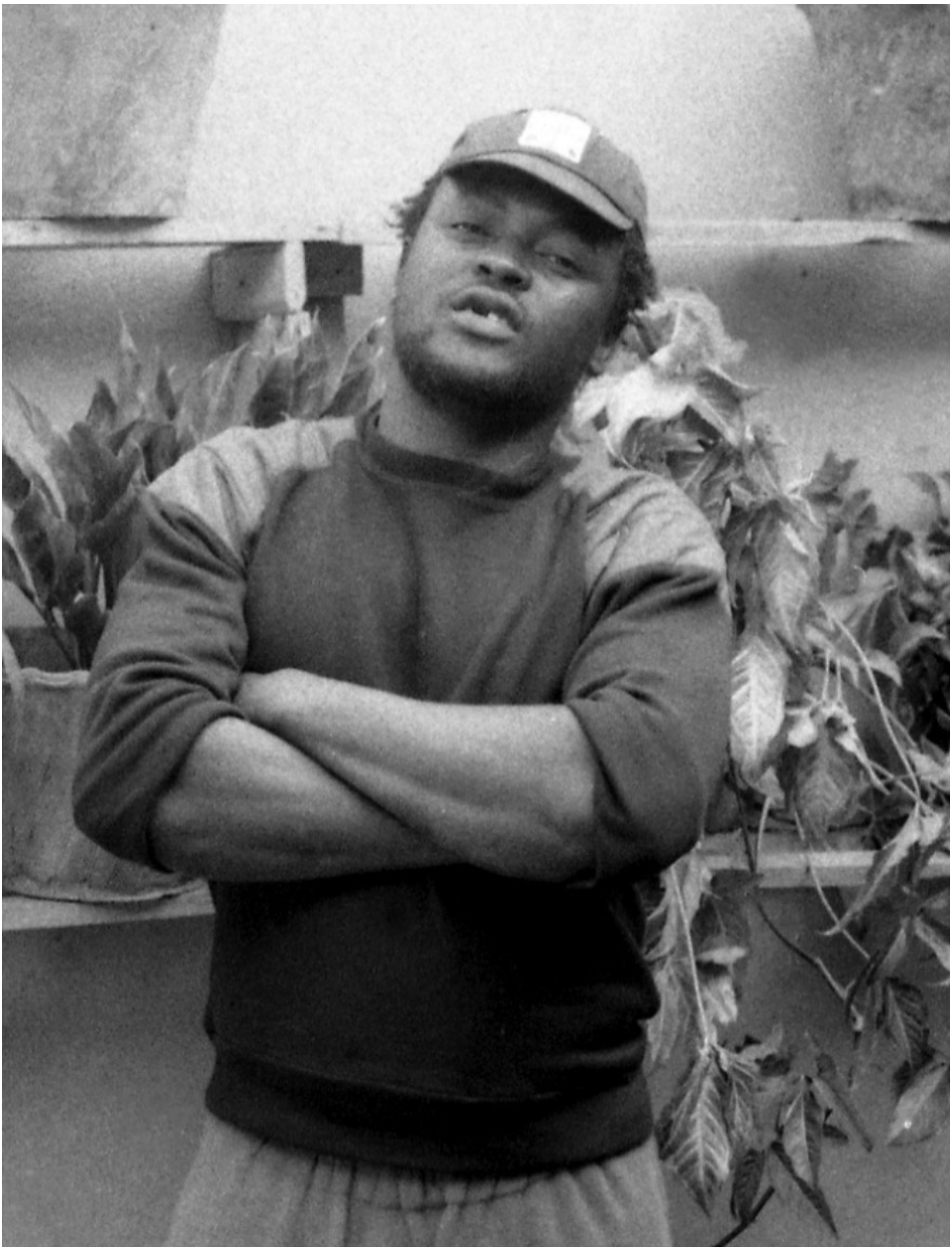
His brother Ken was surprised when he started following the tributes to his brother that appeared on the internet after his death. He knew Sugar was well loved by his fans but never fully understood the extent of the affection and allegiance he inspired in people far outside Jamaica. "I get up every day and I check the internet and see what's going on, what he means to people. For me, by brother is all about love -love and unity and stick together. His legacy is the youth."

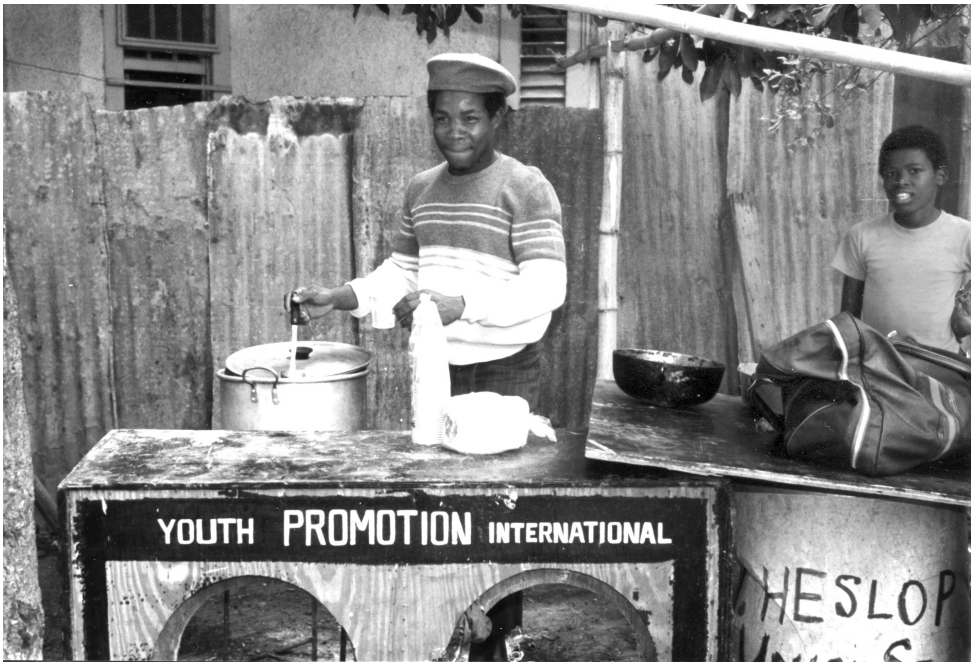
Sugar's legacy continues in his music, his teachings, and the way he lived his life. "The most valuable things I've learnt from daddy is how to love, how to share, [to] stand up for my right and what I believe in," Tamar explained. "He thought me about GOD and to keep the faith and believe in myself. He said, 'Don't you ever give up'."

Sugar's whole life was dedicated to helping people. He never stopped working hard for

what he believed in, and he never, ever let go of his dreams. But, now it's up to the next generation. The job for the youth, and the former youth, is to keep Sugar's memory alive through music and through works. "I think next year, we gonna keep his anniversary," Daddy Ants explains hopefully, looking ahead. "Can't forget Sugar. Have to keep that [show, so] we can feel like he's beside us at all times."

"Can't forget Sugar. Have to keep that show, so we can feel like he's beside us at all times."

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